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## Home and later life : an experiential study

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HOME AND LATER LIFE:

An Experiential Study

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## ABSTRACT.

The principle that older people should be able to live in their own homes is central to health and welfare policies for the elderly. "Home" is seen as playing an important contributory part in the general well-being and the physical and mental health of older people. However, beyond this assertion, the nature of the person-home relationship in later life is little understood. The research presented in this thesis is a systematic attempt to reach below the surface of "belongingness", to reveal the essential qualities of home in later life.

An empirical-phenomenological approach was adopted to uncover these meanings of home. This involved the analysis and interpretation of accounts of over eighty people in Newcastle upon Tyne. Three aspects of home experience are of particular significance for older people. These are dealt with in turn.

Firstly, home seems to take on greater significance in later life, and in many ways the older person's life becomes focussed on the home. The role of the home changes in certain ways. Older people spend more time at home, their interests are often home-based. The home is also more important symbolically as a place of refuge, permanence and independence.

Secondly, the home environment promotes independence amongst many older people, by providing a symbolic and instrumental demarcation between self and others. The house is a material context for maintaining physical independence, self-direction, and the avoidance of feelings of obligation.

Thirdly, there is often a strong attachment to home. There are several possible contributory factors behind this desire to "stay put": the memories that are associated with the home; an awareness that the end of life is approaching; familiarity with the home environment; a feeling of being "rooted" to a specific place.



## CONTENTS

List of tables and figures	5
1. Introduction	6
2. Home and ageing: theoretical perspectives	12
3. An empirical phenomenology of home	79
4. Meanings of home	109
5. Home focus: the increasing significance of home in later life	160
6. Independence and home	213
7. Attachment to home	254
8. Memories, the home and the elderly	279
9. Familiarity with the home environment	334
10. Conclusion.	375
Appendices	406
References	438

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 4.1	Categories of home meaning	112
Table 4.2	Frequency of mention of categories	127
Table 4.3	Common and group meanings of home	129
Table 4.4	Association matrix of home meanings	141
Table 4.5	SSA input matrix of associations	142
Figure 4.1	SSA plot- four groups of meanings	146
Figure 4.2	SSA plot- linkages between meanings	147
Figure 4.3	SSA plot- role of "do what you want" and "it's what you make it"	153
Figure 4.4	SSA plot- common and group meanings	155
Table 5.1	Numbers of places mentioned	164
Table 5.2	Time spent outside the home	164
Table 5.3	Usage of places outside the home	165
Table 5.4	Reasons for increasing home focus	172
Table 6.1	Home-independence relationship	226
Table 6.2	Structure of home-independence	227
Table 6.3	Alternative accommodation	232
Table 7.1	Have people considered moving?	257
Table 7.2	Reasons for not moving	259
Table 7.3	People who do not want to move	265
Table 7.4	People who would not mind moving	269
Table 7.5	Why older people stay put	273
Table 8.1	Memories and the home	297
Table 9.1	Hopes and plans for the future	369

## Chapter 1.

### INTRODUCTION.

The principle that older people should be able, and be helped, to live in their own homes as long as they wish is a tenet of most health and welfare policies for the elderly. The home environment is seen as playing an important contributory role in the general well-being, and the physical and mental health of older people. The Wagner Report (1988) notes the advantages of "staying put" in a long-familiar environment or supportive neighbourhood. Recent reports by the Audit Commission (1986) and Sir Roy Griffiths (1988) have focused on how to provide effective community care in order to support people in their own homes.

However, the nature of the person-home relationship in later life is little understood. Of the growing literature on the meaning of home (Werner et al, 1985; Sixsmith, 1984), only a few studies have addressed the specific dimension of old age (Peace et al, 1983, 1987; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1980). Without the insights provided by basic research, there is always a danger that inadequate or invalid concepts and principles may be translated into policy and welfare practice. For instance, in residential settings for the elderly, too much emphasis has been given to functional support, and too little to the quality of life in general terms. Furthermore, policies for the elderly in the community has focussed on instrumental issues, such as the development of financial schemes and domiciliary



care, aimed at providing the basic necessities to keep the elderly independent as long as possible. These are worthwhile objectives, but seem to be defined mainly by the perceptions of the professionals concerned. To reiterate a question put by Anthea Tinker (1977), do we "really know what the elderly want or do we as a society provide what we think they want, or ought to want?".

Perhaps this is a product of a tendency to view ageing as a "problem" (Goldberg, 1983). This is evident in the predominant concern for the minority of people who are living in specialist accommodation for the elderly. Even within community-based studies attention has been focused mainly on the problems of planned accommodation and related issues, such as the segregation of the elderly. By focussing on old age as a problem, research has limited our understanding of ageing and home as a normal part of living and has implicitly reinforced the negative image of old age. For example, the critique of residential care by Willcocks and associates (1987) depends on a model of "home", yet their understanding of "home" is itself derived from an examination of the inadequacies of residential settings.

Conversely, little attention has been given to ageing and home as a "normal" part of living. In particular, very few studies have examined the

taken-for-granted links between the older person and the home environment, while there is an absence of research into the emotional aspects of this relationship. There have been vague discussions of familiarity, attachment, and memories, but these have been without an adequate framework to synthesize all the disparate issues. Work by Rowles (1980, 1981), Howell (1983) and Golant (1984) have gone some way to filling this gap, but there is still a need for basic research. The objective of the present study is to provide a coherent and general account of home experience in later life. There is a need for systematic research that reaches below the surface of vague concepts such as "belongingness", to reveal the qualities that constitute "home" in later life.

The research must begin from the experiences of people themselves, prior to the definition of "problem" areas and the building of theories. Concern is not so much with home environment as a physical entity or commodity, but with the home as a meaningful context for everyday life. This has conceptual and methodological implications. As Rapoport (1982, 144) argues, "the environment that affects people is the perceived and cognizable environment. . . and it must be approached phenomenologically". To this end it is important to look at the elderly as individuals who determine and interpret their own situations. Within this broadly



phenomenological perspective, the environment in general, and the home specifically, play a significant role. The research presented here aims to uncover some of the basic structures that define this role.

A complex picture of home and old age emerged from the research. To illustrate, older people are likely to have lived in their present homes for a long time and may have many memories associated with the place. They are surrounded by their possessions, which contribute to a feeling of familiarity. They may feel at home simply because their husband or wife is sitting in the chair opposite. These are perhaps the subjective but important qualities that make a home. However, there are also instrumental aspects: the need to keep warm in winter, or the ability to manage the house. All these factors may affect how an older person feels about and experiences their home. The point is that the concept of home is not straightforward. It is a complex amalgam of subjective feelings and physical constraints and opportunities. Moreover, as a person ages, the home may take on new roles in the context of the changing life circumstances that often accompany old age.

This thesis is divided into three main sections: theoretical, methodological and empirical. Chapter 2 is a theoretical overview of the concept of home. A number of themes are identified in the general and

gerontological literature on home, such as privacy, the symbolic quality of home, and the role of the family. These themes are used to develop a general theory of home as a transaction between the individual and the physical environment. Methodological issues are discussed in Chapter 3. Considerable time is spent in outlining the principles of "empirical phenomenology" as an approach that is sensitive to the complexities of individual human experience, while remaining rigorous and systematic in social science terms. In Chapter 4, a preliminary empirical analysis of the meaning of home is presented. This identifies a number of specific meanings of home and gives indications as to the wider dimensions of home experience that are particularly pertinent to older people. The following five chapters (Chapters 5 to 9) are devoted to a deeper exploration of three emerging themes: the increasing significance of home in later life; independence; and attachment to home. Finally, Chapter 10 summarises the main empirical findings and elucidates a number of conceptual developments for the understanding of person-place interaction.

## Chapter 2

### **HOME AND AGEING: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES.**

## INTRODUCTION.

In this chapter, the concept of home is initially explored by examining the various theoretical and empirical themes that have been developed in the literature, both generally and in relation to old age. "Home" is shown to be a complex entity with a number of specific meanings. However, it is possible to develop a more general theory based on home as a transaction between the person and a place. From this perspective, home is seen as a function of the motivations of the dweller and the particular qualities of the environment.

Developing these themes, a second purpose of this chapter is to define a framework for the exploration of the person-home relationship. The approach is broadly phenomenological and a transactional perspective is appropriate as it implies that the relationship with the home environment can only be understood in the context of the wider experience of the individual. For example, factors such as increasing frailty or decline in income may have a bearing on how older people use and value their homes. In this chapter an experiential model of ageing is developed as a theoretical framework for the interpretation of person-home interaction.



## THE CONCEPT OF HOME.

In recent years a great deal of research effort has been devoted to uncovering the "meaning of home" (cf. Altman and Werner, 1985; Sixsmith, 1986). Although there are few studies that have directly addressed the issue of home experience in old age (cf. Willcocks et al, 1987; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1982), there is a body of work that could be seen as involving "home" as an implicit component. Within this, there is a tendency to emphasise physical deterioration and socio-spatial constriction; to define old age as a "problem", rather than as a normal aspect of life. This negative image of old age has implications for both defining the empirical problem areas, and the way these are treated analytically. For example, within the literature on housing there has been a definite emphasis on specially planned housing for older people, rather than unplanned housing (Butler, 1986; Lawton and Hoover, 1981). This is remarkable given that most older people live, and function perfectly well, in ordinary housing without the need for special provision or adaptation (Rosow, 1967). Also much of the gerontological literature that has relevance to the understanding of home experience in old age has been focussed on negative aspects of life in residential settings. This perspective may offer us

insight into what is "not home", but may be an inadequate conceptualisation of "home" in itself. Thus, it is important to begin by discussing the concept of home in general terms rather than focussing specifically on the gerontological contribution.

An examination of the literature gives the impression that each writer presents a different concept and perspective, and the wide range of perspectives immediately suggests that "home" is a complex phenomena. However, this inherent complexity is still little understood, as much of the work has not involved empirical research, while overall the field of study lacks a coherent theoretical framework (Sixsmith, 1986). However, a number of themes can be identified and these are discussed in turn:

#### The Physical Environment of Home.

In purely physical terms, "home" can be equated to "house" and the important components of this conception include structural form, architectural style, the convenience of the house, space and location. This perspective emphasises the functional attributes of the home, and research has concentrated mainly on the physical determinants of user satisfaction. Segal (1973) and Cramer (1960) point to differences in



architectural style as the basis for differentiating between types of home. From a more functional point of view, Hole and Attenburrow (1966) looked into the housing needs of dwellers and outlined design principles for dayrooms, kitchens, bathrooms, bedrooms, furniture heating, etc.

At a more general level, there is a considerable literature from various social science disciplines on issues such as residential satisfaction, housing preferences and residential mobility (e. g. Rossi, 1955; Clark and Cadwallader, 1973; Clark, 1981; Brown 1982; Michelson, 1966; Stokols et al, 1983; Shlay, 1985). Rossi's (1955) classic study, "Why Families Move", provided insights into residential mobility as a response to broad characteristics of the dwelling type and the economic and social context. He concluded that housing mobility is related to the housing needs generated by changes in the family composition associated with life cycle changes. Other studies have also emphasised the life-cycle as the determinant of housing requirements (Stokols, 1982; Van Vliet et al, 1985; Lawrence, 1987; 1988). Although the myriad studies have emphasised many divergent issues, there is a central premise; that the individual dweller has certain preferences or requirements with respect to housing, and seeks to match these with an appropriate dwelling. This is also manifest in welfare policy, to a

certain extent, where authorities have attempted to define minimum standards of housing, such as basic amenities and adequate space.

In respect to the physical qualities of the home environment, it has been recognised that older people are much more likely to be living in sub-standard housing or to be without basic amenities. In England, the main empirical basis for these claims comes from the English House Condition Survey 1981 (DoE, 1983). The survey found that, whatever the tenure, households in the poorer stock were likely to have one or more of four characteristics: to be headed by an elderly person; to be a small household of one or two people; to be dependent on a low income; and to have been resident a long time. The strength of the relationship between ageing and poorer housing is certain, and a number of possible reasons for this situation have been outlined by Tinker and White (1979): the lack of finance; the lack of knowledge; inability to understand the complexities of the housing grant system; the lack of builders who are prepared to undertake small jobs; and an unwillingness to go through the upheaval of carrying through building work.

In terms of the physical well-being<sup>of</sup> the elderly, one should consider the possible relationship between inadequate housing and ill-health (Brennan and Little,

1979). As Barrowclough and Pinel (1979) point out, the elderly may be much more vulnerable to these effects than the rest of the population. An issue of particular importance is heating (Wicks, 1978), where poor living conditions and the cost of fuel can contribute to low room temperatures and the possibility of hypothermia.

There is a need to attempt to rectify the problem of poor living conditions amongst the elderly. Traditionally, housing aid has been the domain of local authorities through the provision of grants. However, the current emphasis has been on alternative ways of overcoming the housing problems of elderly home-owners, and a number of Staying Put initiatives have been developed (Wheeler, 1982; 1986; Taylor, 1986). The main objective of these schemes have been to enable elderly owner occupiers to release capital tied up in their houses so that they can undertake necessary improvements and repairs. A publication by the Building Societies Association (1985) gives details of a number of initiatives that have been developed by building societies, local authorities and charitable organisations that have adopted the "Staying Put" perspective as well as other approaches, such as housing advice schemes. Other recent initiatives include "care and repair" schemes, that have been set up specifically to help owner-occupiers to undertake "small works" of repair and adaptation (cf. Fisk, 1987, ch7).



The concept of "staying put" has been developed from the awareness of the need to improving the physical living conditions of the elderly. However, the term is expressive of a recognition or assumption that to "stay put" is what most old people want at the end of their lives (cf. Salvage, 1986). This points to social or emotional issues that are outside the emphasis on the physical and the financial that are the core of the "staying put" initiatives. Unfortunately, these abstract issues are neither articulated nor fully understood, and are simply taken for granted. Few people have taken the time to ask why older people wish to stay put, or to examine the basis of their attachment to their homes.

It is pertinent to note that despite the apparent poor living conditions of many elderly people, most are happy with their accommodation as shown by an Age Concern (1974) survey, where 87% of respondents were satisfied with their living conditions. A surprising aspect of the House Condition Survey is a discrepancy between "objective" conditions, as defined by the surveyors, and the occupants' own views. It was found that relatively few people in the worst circumstances considered that their housing was in a bad general condition, and there was a consistent tendency to underrate specific defects. Moreover, even among those

who recognised faults, there was an unwillingness or inability to undertake repairs. Research in America (O'Bryant and Wolf, 1983) shows that "objective" measures of conditions are poor predictors of housing satisfaction and suggest four possible factors behind "attachment to home": familiarity and competence; family orientation and memories; status conferred by ownership; and value for money.

#### The Symbolic Qualities of Home.

The physical environment of the home has important symbolic attributes as well as purely functional ones, and it is these attributes that may turn a "house" into a "home" (Lawrence, 1987). This is a basic premise of architectural semiotics (Krampen, 1978; Lawrence, 1983). Umberto Eco (1973) argues that the meanings of the perceived physical environment are dependent on the codes that determine physical form. Architecture is a type of communication whereby "messages" are decoded and meanings derived by the users of buildings. The meanings associated with an environment may be subtle and complex and even the most mundane objects may acquire significance (Lawrence, 1983). The point here is that housing design needs to be based on an awareness of these issues. As Lawrence (1983) argues:

". . . it has become apparent that to answer user requirements which are only functional or pragmatic, is insufficient, if these representations and images associated with the built environment are ignored. It is evident that architects and planners should accept that the physical form of man-made spaces and objects and the social system in which they occur are interwoven and inseparable".

The built form of the house is an expressive medium in different ways. A number of authors (Polikoff, 1969; Rakoff, 1977; Rapoport, 1969) have stressed a cultural basis. Rapoport (1969) argues that physical form is not simply determined by climatic conditions or human "needs", but reflects the values, uses, goals and meanings implicit in the particular cultural milieu. These meanings have important implications for what physical structure can be experienced as "home". Rakoff (1977) points out that the house is a dominant symbol of a variety of life experiences in American culture. In particular, the house symbolizes personal control in terms of having control of one's own private space, which in turn affords a feeling of control over one's own destiny and self-fulfilment.

House form is symbolic at a personal as well as socio-cultural level. Csikszentmihalyi and



Rochberg-Halton (1981) acknowledge the cultural basis of home, but suggest that it is still a matter of individual interpretation and experience:

"... home is a goal or intention that becomes realized through the attention the inhabitants give to it. . . Attention is focused on a set of objects which release their meanings by activating latent memories and by bringing into consciousness information about the world".

One aspect of the symbolic quality of house form that has been a central issue within the home literature is the "home as symbol of self" (cf. Rapoport, 1969, 1982; Becker, 1973; Cooper, 1972, 1974; Pratt, 1982). This concept developed from an interactionist perspective, which suggested that the place in which a person lives tells something about that person. From this standpoint, the house becomes symbolic of the dweller, not only in the sense of showing others that the house is occupied by someone in particular (Duncan and Duncan, 1976a, 1976b), but also in the sense of reinforcing the occupant's self-conception (Becker, 1977; Appleyard, 1979; Rapoport, 1982). The question of how the home reflects or reinforces identity is difficult. People seem to need external assurance of their own identity (Erikson, 1968) and the material manifestation of the house can act in this way. Through

the personalization, the home becomes an expression of how the person sees himself and how he would like himself to be seen (Goffman, 1959). Thus, the home may be a necessary component of identity and a sense of self,

This line of argument is followed by Steinfeld (1981) in a study of the meaning of housing for older people. Steinfeld stresses that housing choice is largely a matter of self-evaluation. How a person assesses their own circumstances, needs and options is seen as the most significant factor in housing choice and mobility. Steinfeld suggests that identity is a major dimension of housing choice:

"The reluctance to move as a response to devalued status passages indicates that housing, to older people, is a means to retain a valued identity. Unlike the 'moving-up' that occurs at younger ages, moving to an older person confirms and undesirable change in identity" (Steinfeld, 1981, p209).

There are important implications here for those elderly people who move from their homes as a response to changes in their lives, such as physical impairment, or economic necessity. The new place may present an image that is not consonant with the self-image of the individual, who may perceive the situation as a threat

to their identity, because they no longer have control over the expressive medium of the house. Given that most of the responses to the housing "needs" of older people have been in terms of specialised housing, it would be difficult not to construe a move to this type of housing as expressive of "old age", with a definite emphasis on vulnerability, role loss, and dependence. Generally though, most movers do so willingly. It may be that they have come to terms with their new circumstances in life. A move may be part of a larger re-orientation- an acceptance of old age. Also, the move may be entirely voluntary, such as with many retirement migrants, who can be seen as redefining their identities through relocation.

A good deal of gerontological interest in this general area has focussed on people in institutional settings. Communal living by definition prohibits the expression of self through the built environment. To an extent, a move to an institution can be seen as a surrender of the personal self to a self that is entirely socially defined. Because of this, many commentators have emphasised the need for personalisation within the residential setting (PSSC, 1977) in order to promote more "homelike" setting. Steinfeld (1981) suggests that personalisation helps people to establish their identity in a new setting. In many cases, furniture and personal possessions is



displayed prominently, even in cramped circumstances. However, Steinfeld notes that the use of personalisation varies considerably between individuals and offers a basic typology that relates together personality, adjustment strategies and situation.

Whatever the approach adopted by the individual, institutions should offer scope for personalisation, and hence the expression of self. Booth (1985) examined the regimes in local authority homes and found that most officers-in-charge were amenable both to residents bringing some of their furniture with them, and to them decorating their rooms to suit their own tastes. However, there were factors operating against this. For example, homes with small bedrooms or fitted furniture were often unable to accommodate large items of furniture. Moreover, 9% of homes did not allow any items of residents' own furniture. The issue is not straightforward however, and Booth argues that allowing people to personalise their rooms is "one thing, but encouraging them is another".

### Habitation, Territoriality, Security

A number of authors have used the metaphor of "roots" to express the feeling of being attached to a particular place. Toffler (1971, 90) suggests that the notion of

roots involves a "fixed place, a permanently anchored 'home'". Weil (1955) and Coles (1970) argue that to have "roots" is a fundamental part of human nature, sustaining a need for stability and order that in turn sustains other needs. Feldman (1988), however, suggests that psychological bonds can transcend geographical space, and may focus on types of places rather than specific locations. From another perspective, Seamon (1979) sees "roots" as deriving from the habitual character of human life and a corresponding place familiarity. "Rootedness" is thus the "power of home to organise the habitual, bodily stratum of the person's lived space. Literally, the home roots the person spatially, providing a physical centre for departure and return" (Seamon, 1979, p79).

This last point is important, and suggests that an understanding of home must also involve an understanding of what places constitute the "non-home" within human experience. In cultures where the location of the home is fixed, a quality of home is that of locus in space, in that it is the place from which one must go, and to which one must inevitably return (Tuan, 1975). In western societies, different activities tend to be spatially separated. There is usually a distinction between home activities (sleeping, eating, relaxing) and non-home activities (working, shopping, etc.). Although these distinctions are often blurred, the reinforcement

between activity and place serves to define our orientation within the physical world. Home acts as both a behavioural locus and as the centre for thinking about the world (Gelwicks, 1970). The argument can be extended to a further differentiation of activities and space (Canter, 1977), but the activities specifically associated with the home may be one of the first components of meaning to accrue to a place of residence.

The issue of territoriality (Porteous, 1970; Fried and Gleicher, 1961) can be seen as part of this home/non-home distinction. However, defining a place as "home" in territorial terms also implies the assertion of personal jurisdiction within that place. The house is particularly significant in that it provides a material boundary between the self and others. Porteous (1970) argues that home is the ultimate basis for satisfying the territorial demands of security, stimulation and identity. The attributes of home that provide this basis are control and stability. Through these, a person feels secure within the home territory and can start to reveal their identity, and thus stimulate individuality.

Haddon (1973) suggests that security is facilitated through ownership of the property, or at least a minimum level of rights to the property. Within western



cultures, rights of access are jealously guarded and are clearly a fundamental aspect of home experience. Korosec-Serfaty and Bolitt (1986) in a study of people's experience of burglary, show how uncontrolled access can undermine the basic feeling of security in one's home. The significance of burglary is not so much the loss of material possessions, but viol de l'intimite'; a profound feeling of violation (or rape) of one's intimacy. In many respects the security offered by the home is more symbolic than actual. As Bachelard (1969) puts it, the home is a "shell" that one builds around the personal self. It is a feeling of being protected. The home is appreciated as a haven or refuge in which the threats of the outside can be effectively excluded.

### Privacy.

The concept of privacy is closely related to those of territoriality and security, and finds its basis in the control that the individual has over access into the home space. Schearer and Laufer (1976) stress the connection between the physical home environment and the self, where home is the place where one can be alone, free from unwanted influences and irritations, through control of access to the self. Altman (1975) views privacy as a process of micro-personal boundary

regulation, whereby the individual makes themselves accessible or inaccessible through the mechanisms of personal space and territoriality. Pastalan (1978) goes beyond an examination of the mechanisms of privacy to look at its psychological outcomes. He defines privacy in terms of four states: solitude, intimacy, anonymity and reserve. These are functional in supporting autonomy, enabling emotional release, and allowing self-evaluation and limited and protected communication. All these are contingent upon privacy, and the home has a prime role as an environmental medium for privacy.

The issue of privacy has received a considerable amount of attention from gerontologists in relation to life in residential homes. Booth (1985) stresses the need for individual privacy within residential settings for a number of reasons. Firstly, it can shield the individual who might be vulnerable to the actions and power of others. Secondly, it offers a space for self-expression and choice, which might be restricted by the constraints of communal living. Thirdly, a private space is needed, because people who are forced to live in public "may only be able to find the privacy they need by turning in upon themselves."

Although privacy is recognized as a basic human need, there seems to be an unfortunate neglect of it, both in the physical design of old people's homes and

the care practices within them (PSSC, 1977). In his study of residential homes in England, Booth (1985) found that 98% of them allowed residents to use their own bedrooms. However, conventional practices within the homes tended to erode the use of private space. Very often, residents were asked to leave their rooms while cleaning was in progress. Also, many residents did not have their own rooms, while those in single bedrooms were often unable to lock their doors. Booth concludes that the general picture is an "odd mixture of sensitivity and perfunctoriness" on the part of staff.

Similar results were obtained by Willcocks et al (1987) in a study of a hundred local authority institutions. Of these, only eight had rooms which were lockable, and in only two were residents able to lock their rooms from the inside. The lack of a private space was seen to inhibit many of the activities that require seclusion. For instance, many residents were forced to use public spaces in which to receive visitors. Willcocks et al argue that:

"... space which is not defensible undermines the sense of ownership which residents may wish to attach to their rooms; without such control this private space becomes common territory" (Willcocks et al, 1987, p91).



This argument is central to Clough's (1981) suggestion that old people's homes should provide a "living base" for residents that is broadly equivalent to ordinary housing situations. He argues that the underlying basis of normal life at home is security of tenure, and the right of control over a private space. Clough also notes that many informal, daily events and activities (relaxing, reading the paper, chatting to friends) take place in the intimacy of the home, and that the semi-public lounges of typical residential homes do not foster such an intimacy. From this he argues that:

". . . bed-sitting rooms should become the private base for residents. . . Using one's room as a private base means that the individual has less fear of an invasion of privacy and a greater opportunity to avoid other people. . . In terms of future planning it is necessary to build larger single bed-sitting rooms, even at the cost of fewer or smaller group sitting rooms" (Clough, 1981, 193-4).

This basic principle is also apparent in the notion of the "residential flatlet" proposed by Willcocks et al (1987). This would be somewhere between present single rooms and sheltered housing, offering greater flexibility than currently exists within institutions

yet preserving the supportive qualities of the environment.

### The Social Dimension of Home.

Many of the issues discussed so far, such as home as "territoriality", "privacy" and as a symbol of self, emphasise the role of the home as the domain of the individual. Yet it is obvious that most homes are social units. There are a number of levels to this social dimension. Firstly, there is the social domain of the house itself. In western cultures, the home as a social unit refers to the nuclear family, and the family unit has its physical equivalent in the dwelling unit (whether this is a house or a flat). Hayward (1977) in an empirical study found the family, in a personal and affective sense, to be a primary dimension of home experience. Participants emphasised the importance of relationships, love and togetherness, a sense of belonging, warmth and security, mutual respect and a feeling of being cared-for as the central meaning of home. The issue of relationships is, in fact, remarkably absent from the home literature. Sixsmith (1986) has gone some way to filling this void. Based on an in-depth empirical study, a number of dimensions of the relationships issue were defined: the quality of the relationship; the type of relationship and the control

over interaction; the emotional environment; and friendship and socializing.

The social dimension of home is also significant at the neighbourhood or community level. Hayward (1977) points to the wider social context of home, which is not only a matter of close personal relationships, but also the social ties and interactions with family members, neighbours and acquaintances. The significance of these interactions lies in their relative permanence and continuity, leading to a sense of familiarity and "at-homeness" within the locale. There are a number of seminal works that are pertinent to this issue, notably Bott (1971), Gans (1962), Willmott and Young (1957) and Townsend (1957). Much of this work has been devoted to the study of long-established neighbourhoods such as in Boston's West End, and in the East End of London. They perhaps represent the image of traditional urban communities, emphasising extended family networks, mutual support and a sense of "community".

A dimension of these works is the interlinking of social networks and the specific physical locale. Proshansky and associates (1970) argue that neither of these components of home can be understood without reference to the other. This is evident in studies that have examined the break-up of established communities, where the value of social ties within the specific



locale becomes very important to the people involved. Fried (1963), in "Grieving for a Lost Home" (1963), suggests that social ties have a spatial identity:

"It is the sense of belonging someplace, in a particular place which is quite familiar and easily delineated, in a wide area in which one feels "at home". This is the core of the local area. And this applied for many people who have few close relationships within that area. Even familiar and expectable streets and houses, faces at the window and people walking by, personal greetings and impersonal sounds may serve to designate the concrete foci of a sense of belonging somewhere and may provide special kinds of interpersonal and social meaning to a region one defines as 'home'".

Thus, at a number of spatial levels, the home is a social entity and future research needs to develop this dimension adequately. So far only a limited number of studies have dealt with this issue. For example, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1982) examined meanings of home from the perspectives of different members of the same family. Another researcher who has developed these issues is Jerome Tognoli (1979, 1980, 1982). His particular focus has been the tension that has traditionally existed between male and female relationships with the home. Through childhood

socialization and traditional divisions of labour, the stereotype of the home as a predominantly female domain has been a powerful facet of home experience. The tension between male and female social roles seems to be emphasised in the physical realm of the house, leading to an "outward" orientation amongst men. Thus, the home is an important mediating factor in family relationships.

The research on home as a social phenomenon has tended to present a very positive vision of family life and strong social bonds within a locale. To put this in perspective, one should admit that not all homes are scenes of contentment (Sixsmith 1988a). Nevertheless, idealised image of the home and community often surface in welfare policy. For example, the Williams Committee (1967) expressed the opinion that:

"... even the best residential home is likely to be ranked second best in the mind of those who come into it. It cannot replace the independence a person enjoys in his own home or give what an affectionate family can provide".

From this critique of residential care, the reaction has been to place increasing emphasis on domiciliary care (Townsend, 1962; Meacher, 1969; DHSS, 1981). Clough (1981), however, is critical of some of

the unqualified assumptions that lie behind the attitude that living in the community is preferable for all people at all times. Firstly, models of domiciliary care tend to be idealised, in contrast to the picture of inadequate residential care. Of more relevance to the present discussion is his second comment, that the ". . . superiority of home life seems based on the fact that it is the norm". He admits that "home is best" for some people, but calls into question some of the myths that surround the concept of home:

"Many old people may never find real warmth, real nurture and care and real friendship while living in their own homes. This may be so whatever quantity, quality and type of domiciliary services are offered, for it is doubtful if such services can ever supply such needs. Some old people may be loved and cherished in the setting of a residential home in a way that is not possible in any other type of care" (Clough, 1981, p12).

To some extent, this view is contrary to accepted wisdom, yet it provides an important emphasis on the potential negative qualities of home experience in later life. One problem that is widely recognised is loneliness (Townsend and Tunstall, 1968; Hadley and Webb, 1974). Through bereavement, many older people live alone in their homes (the 1981 census showed that



this amounted to some 29% of all people of pensionable age), Clayton (1975) found that living alone could be related to depressive symptoms over long periods of time. Lopata (1973) showed that half the people, in her study of widows in Chicago, said that loneliness was their most serious problem, despite being widowed for many years.

Loneliness, however, is a difficult term to define objectively (Hadley and Webb, 1974) and most commentators make a distinction between "loneliness" and "aloneness". Townsend (1957) refers to "isolation" and "desolation", where the outcome of loneliness is based more on the individual's subjective evaluation, rather than on the objective situation per se. Weiss (1973) argues that loneliness is not caused by being alone, but by the absence of a valued relationship. The subjective dimension is perhaps the predominant issue. Fisk (1986) suggests that the major findings of studies of isolation and loneliness is the very low level of loneliness that is actually encountered. Fisk proposes that the elderly have greater powers of resilience and adaptability that they are credited with, and that the extent of loneliness is less than is implied by the negative stereotype.

Many studies of loneliness have implicated the home as the archetypal place of loneliness. This is

illustrated in the following quotes from participants in two studies:

". . . there's this dead silence. Like the whole world has just come to an end. All of a sudden you get this feeling that you're completely alone, that there is no one else in the world. You look out the windows, you walk back and forth from room to room, you watch television, and you're dead" (Weiss, 1973).

"People say they call me up at 6.00 and 'you're not home'- I tell them it may be a good time for most people but it isn't a good time to get me because then I feel too lonesome. I just get out. I have a car, so I drive around a little" (Lopata, 1969).

For people living alone, the emptiness of the house can seem a stark contrast to how it had been in the past, and seems to magnify the feeling of desolation. This can become so acute that one has to "just get out" to relieve the oppressive silence of the house. From a lifespan perspective, the role of the house is ambivalent. While one is bringing up a family, it is the focus of one's life. But in later years, the house which has afforded the nuclear family, becomes the focus of loneliness. This may be particularly significant for

those older people who are housebound, and where the front door is a barrier to social contact.

Nevertheless, to evaluate the role of the home, it is important to look at the personal meanings that living alone has for people. Rubinstein (1986), in his study of old men living alone, draws attention to some of the possible advantages of living alone. For example, "independence" is a positive outcome of being alone, as opposed to being "tied down". Indeed, this situation can be something that is valued and pursued by some people. People can also see living alone in terms of "control", or the ability to "shut out" other people, and the physical boundary of the home has a clear role to play in this respect. Another issue is in terms of "giving" and "taking", where Rubinstein's subjects were very apprehensive about becoming a "burden" to others. The significance of this is that living alone in later life should not be directly equated to loneliness, and that individual situations are likely to be more complex and equivocal than has been assumed.

### Independence.

A major theme in gerontological research has been dependency and independence in later life (cf. Phillipson et al, 1986; Fisk, 1986; Munnichs and Van den



Heuvel, 1976). In respect to the issue of home, increasing attention has been given to the apparent loss of independence associated with institutional accommodation, while ordinary housing is seen to afford independence in old age (Willcocks et al, 1987).

The concept of "independence" is difficult to define. In one sense, independence can be seen as the ability to do things for oneself. However, beyond this instrumental consideration, there seems to be an important subjective and symbolic quality to the experience of independence. Van den Heuvel (1976) suggests that independence should be seen in terms of the responsibility for one's own actions and the power to command resources to carry out those actions. Similarly, Fisk (1986) asserts that it is appropriate to stress independence as opposed to dependence in order to acknowledge ". . . the creativity, vitality, resourcefulness and activity of most elderly".

A good deal of the research into the relationship independence has focused on institutional settings for the elderly (Townsend, 1962; Fennel, 1986). It is the important qualities of self-determination that seem to be absent in institutional settings, and most studies on residential living use the word "quiescence" to describe the quality of place. This observation is made by Willcocks et al (1987), who develop a critique of

residential "homes" based on a comparison with "domestic" home. They suggest that a key difference lies in the role of "domestic" home as a "personal power base and a source of self-identity". They argue that these qualities afford independence to the older person:

"The ability to continue to master the physical environment despite frailty confers power upon the individual, and this in turn can enhance personal capacity to interact beyond the locus of home. Moreover, such abilities will reinforce an older person's confidence to manage. . . . The home can also play an important role in defining the individual as an 'independent' person, because the dweller can "conceal incapacities and limitations from others who are sometimes only too ready to infer that incapacity in one area means incapacity across all areas of life" (Willcocks et al, 1987)

Willcocks et al conclude that the declining powers are to some extent supported by the very fact of living in one's own home. Even those people who require considerable help from outside, can continue to maintain control over their lives, especially in a symbolic sense. In contrast, they see traditional residential settings as eroding the basis of independence. The very nature of residential care is to protect the individual in their charge, to take responsibility for their

material needs. Of course, we are all dependent to some extent on other people, but in institutions there seems to be a mutual agreement between carers and residents that the locus of responsibility is with the former. The structure of communal living also tends to inhibit individuality and responsibility through the block treatment of residents. Finally, Willcocks et al point to the relative absence in institutions, of the risk and uncertainty that characterizes life within the community. Again, the contract between the carer and the cared-for, is based on the compromise of the personal independence that characterises life in the domestic home.

But what is the outcome of the loss of independence within institutional settings? A number of commentators have pointed to a possible causal link between institutional care and progressive deterioration or "induced dependency" (Townsend, 1962; PSSC, 1977; DHSS, 1979; Tobin and Lieberman, 1976). Booth (1986) tested this hypothesis by examining the outcome of care in 175 local authority homes. He found no evidence to suggest that homes with very "institutional" regimes will lead to higher rates of dependency than those which offer greater levels of freedom and control. However, he does not discount the "induced-dependency" hypothesis, and suggests a number of extraneous reasons for this result. However, he also suggests that residential life is



inherently institutionalised:

"... the differences between regimes are little more than a veneer on the massive uniformity of institutional life. The common features of residential institutions are so dominant in their effects as to mask or suppress any influence that small differences in the social environment of homes exert" (Booth, 1986, p234).

#### The Emotional Quality of Home.

A number of humanistic geographers (Tuan, 1974; Buttimer, 1980) have emphasised the emotional significance of home, where a sense of belonging and attachment is focussed on the dwelling and locale. One dimension of this is familiarity (Yi-Fu Tuan, 1974), which is defined as the organic relationship between dweller and dwelling place. In this sense, "home" need not be a "house", but within western culture, the significance placed on the physical structure entails a domicentric view of home. Although compelling, these views have been challenged by Sopher (1979), who argues that the domicentric view of home advocates social conformity. In western culture, to be homeless is equivalent to being "unsound. . . unreliable, unsavoury".

Regardless of the specific physical focus, "home" in the emotional sense is seen as an essential and central component of human existence. This is made explicit in Heidegger's (1962) notion of authentic being, in which 'dwelling' (to dwell) is one existential dimension of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1971). To dwell is to care for the qualities of the place in which we dwell, and to be mindful of our essential relation to, and emotional dependence on, that place. Heidegger (1971) and others (Vycinas, 1961), refer to the subordination of the home to the dweller in modern times. They see the home as being just another easily exchanged possession within a materialist culture. Such a mode of being is to be "homeless", to be without centre or focus of being. Without such a centre, modern man is alienated from himself.

These ideas are central to the thinking of Relph (1976), who suggests that the relationship between person and home can be as important as relationships with people. He too suggests that modern mass housing is devoid of feelings of attachment from its inhabitants, creating "placelessness". Perhaps Relph is taking the point too far here. Placelessness is not something that is intrinsic to the physical landscape, but is dependent on the processes that lie behind the creation of landscapes. Central to placelessness is the

disruption of the organic relationship between person and place. This is vividly illustrated in some of the literature on urban renewal in the USA, such as "Grieving for a Lost Home (Fried, 1963). Fried and Gleicher (1961) saw home as:

" . . . a widespread feeling of belonging someplace, of being 'at home' in a region that extends out from, but well beyond, the family dwelling unit. . . individuals feel different spatial regions belong to or do not belong to them and correspondingly, feel that they belong to (or in) specific spatial regions. . . "

For many people affected by renewal, attachment was so strong that the loss of their homes precipitated grief reactions that were comparable to bereavement. Renewal was not just a loss of a house, but a loss of familiar surroundings, spatial identity and social ties; things that cannot be created by architects and planners.

Compared with some of the other areas of study into ageing and the environment, there has been relatively little systematic research into the affective relationship between older people and their homes. Perhaps the most significant insights into this issue has been provided by Graham Rowles in a series of



publications on the geographical experience of older people in urban and rural settings. (Rowles, 1978; 1980; 1981 1983). For example, a study of a small community in rural appalachia (Rowles, 1984) indicated that emotional attachments to place is closely linked to the notion of "insideness", which distinguishes the "home" from peripheral outside places. "Insideness" involves three components; physical intimacy through habituation; social insideness based on a sense of being known and knowing others; and, most importantly, autobiographical insideness grounded in one's personal history in a place. Rowles suggests that, over time, a place becomes personally significant:

"Over many years the physical setting inhabited by the rural old person may. . . accumulate a plethora of such meanings. It may become a scrapbook of the individual's life and an important reinforcement to personal identity. Indeed, a place may come to embody so many layers of meaning that it becomes an expression of self- implying the most intense level of reciprocity between person and environment' (Rowles, 1984, 147).

Rowles makes a distinction between the environmental qualities of rural and urban places. For example, the slow pace of physical and social change can contribute to a feeling of permanence. However, strong

emotional links with place are also experienced by older people in urban settings, Where social networks remain relatively stable, this can help to maintain a feeling of continuity and belonging in the face of distressing environmental change.

The key issue in understanding the emotional quality of place experience is the personal meanings that are built up through one's experience in a place. However, the mechanisms of how and why places become meaningful remain unclear (Howell, 1983), while one also needs to consider the role of ageing in this process.

#### HOME AS A TRANSACTION BETWEEN PERSON AND PLACE.

"Home" is a complex entity, that not only involves the physical components of the house, but a whole range of emotions and personal, social and cultural meanings. However, the multivariate character of home is not particularly reflected in the literature and in many cases the concept is presented and analysed from an often highly circumscribed perspective.

A few studies have attempted to present a more general understanding. For example, Hayward (1977), in an analysis of the psychological concept of home

attempted to define the main dimensions of people's understanding of home. Through an hierarchical cluster analysis, 85 different meanings of home were reduced to nine dimensions: as a relationship with others; as a social network; self-identity; privacy and refuge; as a place of continuity; personalization; as a basis of activity; as a childhood home; as a physical structure. Although these dimensions provide useful insights into the concept of home, Hayward's study still remains a list of meanings. He offers little indication about the wider structure of home experience, nor how these meanings become personally significant to individuals.

In a similar study, Sixsmith (1986) identified twenty shared conceptualizations of home, which were derived from participants' own descriptions. These included aspects such as happiness, belonging, permanence, privacy, self-expression and responsibility. These were shown to be organised within a deeper structure, in terms of the self, other people, and the physical environment. For individuals, the experience of home is a dynamic combination of these qualities. One interesting conclusion of this study was that people may have a number of places that they see as home, and that these different places are experienced in different ways, indicating that people do not necessarily have "static" conceptions of home. Rather, what we see as home is a function of the qualities of a place and of



the needs and desires of people in particular situations in a temporal context. This implies that home experience is a "process" rather than a "state", where the physical environment of home is a means to personal goals, rather than an end in itself

From this perspective, it is possible to interpret the various meanings that have been associated with the concept of home. For instance, it is nonsensical to talk about privacy without referring to the individual's requirement for privacy. Equally, privacy is something that can only become a concern of the individual, because the home offers a medium for privacy. This principle applies to all the other meanings discussed in the review of the home literature. Security, the emotional dimension of home, the symbolic qualities of the house, all reflect the intentions of the dweller within the material context of the home.

An emphasis on the processes of the person-home relationship is reflected in some of the recent <sup>work</sup> by Altman and associates (Altman and Gauvain, 1981; Altman and Rogoff, 1987; Altman et al, 1987; Oxley, et al 1987; Werner et al, 1985), who suggest that home can be understood in terms of a transactional unity between person and place, where home is a "dynamic confluence of people, places and psychological processes". Within this transactional perspective, temporal qualities, such

as linear and cyclical time, temporal salience, scale, pace and rhythm are seen as intrinsic to person-environment relationships. Werner and associates also identify three processes by which people can be linked to a home. Firstly, social rules and relationships refer to the interpersonal processes that occur, such as norms and rules, cultural values and rituals, and emotional, affective and evaluative bonds. Secondly, person and home are linked through 'affordances' (Gibson, 1979). This refers to the range of possible meanings and actions implied by that place for the dweller. Thirdly, person and home are linked through appropriation practices (Korosec-Serfaty, 1976), which refer to the transformation of the physical dwelling into something that is personally meaningful.

In the present study, a transactional approach is used as the basis for understanding the relationship between elderly people and their homes. The focus is upon the environment as it is experienced and upon the home as a meaningful component of this experience. At this point it is important to outline a framework for the analysis of the person-home transaction. This is defined in terms of three components: affordances, appropriation, and ageing.

## THE CONCEPT OF AFFORDANCES

It is possible to understand the person-place interaction in terms of "affordances" (Gibson, 1979). Broadly speaking, affordances can be defined as what the environment allows us to do, that is the constraints and opportunities "afforded" by the physical context. Thus, affordances involve both the material environment and the intentions of the actor within that context. Gibson's theory emphasises the ecological link between humans and the natural world, where the environment is composed of, and directly perceived as, units of meaning:

"... what we perceive when we look at objects are their affordances, not their qualities. We can discriminate the dimensions of difference if required to do so in an experiment, but what the object affords us is what we normally pay attention to" (Gibson, 1979, 134).

The theory of affordances is itself situated in a wider ecological approach to perception. Turvey and associates (1981, 240) summarize the ecological approach in terms of a denial and an assertion: "... the denial of mediating objects between an organism and its environment and the assertion of the intentionality of



perception".

The first of these issues refers to Gibson's belief that perception is "direct" rather than "indirect". "Indirect" perception can be seen as constructing information from primary environmental stimuli, a process that may involve several intermediary stages. In formulating the concept of direct perception, Gibson entirely contradicts the constructivist viewpoint. Notably, perception is direct and is a matter of detecting invariants or structures in the sensory array that specify the properties of the environment, rather than converting inadequate "information", through some mediating process, into meaning. Direct perception is not uncontroversial principle (cf. Heil, 1979; Fodor and Pylynszyn, 1981; Schmitt, 1987) For example, Neisser (1976) and Heil (1981) maintain that cognitive schemata do play a role in the pick-up of information. Ben Zeev (1981) suggests that a further problem lies in how an organism derives meaning ". . . from the sea of infinite meanings".

It is not appropriate to enter into this debate here. The present interest in Gibson's theory lies in its assertion that perception is an intentional process in the phenomenological sense. The theory of affordances offers a useful heuristic for understanding person-environment interaction, as it provides a way of

conceptualising environments that focus on units of meaning rather than component "primitive" stimuli. This has a twofold benefit in that the concept of affordances allows a systematic description and analysis of environments in objective terms, while still taking seriously the subjective and immediate qualities of human experience. A number of authors (Turvey and associates, 1981; Turvey and Shaw, 1979; Runeson, 1977) have argued that this may provide a basis for integrating phenomenological and mechanistic approaches in psychology.

The theory of affordances implies a theory of action. This is implicit in the ecological conception of perception as an intentional act within a system of mutual compatibility between organism and environment. Perception is part of a concurrent system of action within the world, rather than some preliminary and detached state that controls subsequent actions (Costall, 1982). It is the phenomenological intentionality of perception that implies the concept of affordances.

Gibson argued that the objects of perception are the same as those for activity, that is the perceiving that goes with acting. Perceiving is not just awareness, but is "awareness-of". It is this process that links the purposive individual with the meaningful

environment. The ecological reality consists of meaningful things, which in themselves can be discovered and described. He coined the term "affordance" to refer to the particular qualities of an environment, in terms of what it offers or affords an organism. Affordances, however, do not change as the observer changes. They are not bestowed on objects by the observers needs and act of perceiving. Objects offer what they do because they are what they are; they directly afford meaning and value.

Examples of affordances include; paths which afford progress of locomotion; conversely, objects can afford barriers to locomotion; surfaces afford support, equilibrium, posture. Gibson mentions certain affordances that have a bearing on the issue of "home". He uses the term "niche" in an ecological sense, to describe the totality of affordances and refers to how an animal lives and where it lives. A niche refers as much to the individual as to the environment in which it is located, that is how the individual acts in and uses the objective world. Gibson also discusses the physical world in terms of places, that is meaningful spaces that have different affordances. Some places afford danger, while others offer refuge. The term "home" is directly used to describe a place of refuge, where the mate and young are safe from predators. An important quality of this is the affordance of concealment that is dependent



on the enclosure of occluding edges at a point of observation. Gibson sees this basis of privacy in the design of housing.

Although Gibson's empirical work has focused on fairly simple units of perception and action, the basic theoretical principles can be extended to more complex phenomena and larger scale human activity. Kaminski's notion of "ecopsychology" (Kaminski, 1983, 1985; Huber et al, 1984; Fuhrer, 1983) has generalised affordances within a naturalistic theory of human action. In order to examine the interrelation between action and environment it is necessary to begin by defining the "objective reality" of a situation, in terms of its affordances, which are the "objective givens" of the environment. These affordances can be seen as either positive or negative, that is rendering, challenging or constraining actions. However, affordances are only relevant if the individual person is aware of them and has the capability to deal with them. For example, for a car to be driven, there must be someone able to drive it. Thus, affordances relate human action to the objective environment.

Kaminski (1983) suggests that some affordances have their own dynamic. Firstly, a dependent dynamic are those changes in environmental circumstances, which are directly dependent on the course of action. Secondly,

an independent dynamic are those changes in the environment that are independent of the actor. These dynamics impose requirements on the actor, which his or her actions must match.

Thus, the relationship between actor and environment can be described in terms of a dynamic affordance structure. On the one hand, the situation imposes certain demands on the individual, while in turn affording varying degrees of freedom for the attainment of personal goals. According to Kaminski (1983) a general model of human action should be a kind of coping theory, based on the affordance structure of the situation and the characteristics of the individual.

An understanding of the experience of home must begin by defining the affordance structure of the objective milieu. In respect to this, some insights are offered by phenomenological researchers. Korosec-Serfaty (1985), drawing on the work of Heidegger (1958) and Levinas (1961) suggests some phenomenologically related dimensions of dwelling. Firstly, home and dwelling involves an inside/outside dialectic. The interior is defined as separate from the exterior by the boundary of its physical structure. This implies a second dimension, visibility. Because a house has a quality of closedness, the inside cannot be seen from the outside. At the same time the dweller can still choose to be

visible, through hospitality in the home, for example. This choice is itself based on the affordance of control. Within western societies, legal rights, social practices and the physical structure of the house allow the regulation of access between outside and inside. There are perhaps other affordances that serve to define the home environment. For instance, the spatial distinction between the known and the unknown imposes varying degrees of geographical specificity on environmental experiences.

#### APPROPRIATION OF MEANINGS.

Gibson's discussion of affordances offers little indication as to how an organism becomes aware of the affordances of the world. Indeed, he asserts that affordances exist objectively and are directly perceived without processes of inference. He does, however, give indications that some affordances require mediating factors. For example, he admits that for a postbox to afford posting letters requires a cultural context that includes letter-writing and a postal system. Schmitt (1987) argues that such an affordance cannot be perceived without prior knowledge of the implicit function of an object.



One must conclude that some affordances may rely on cognitive processes (Neisser, 1976, 1977), especially if these involve complex person-environment relationships, such as the perception of social categories (cf. Schmitt, 1987). This does not mean that the concept of affordance should be compromised. Two principles are relevant here. Firstly, an individual's relation to a complex object is as if it was directly perceived. That is to say that most behaviours operate at an unreflective, often unconscious level, structured by a particular affordance. Secondly, affordances specify invariants within the environment, even though they may be "constructed". This concurs with the phenomenological insistence on the "intersubjectivity", rather than "subjectivity", of experience.

Nevertheless, it is important that the concept of affordances is supported by a theory of how they develop within the environmental experience of people. In the present context, the concept of space appropriation (Korosec-Serfaty, 1973, 1975; Graumann, 1978; Seamon, 1979; Werner et al, 1985) is used to refer to the processes by which people invest meaning and significance to specific places. Appropriation is the transaction that occurs between person and place. At one level this may be assumption of ownership and control over a place and is often characterised by active transformation of that place through alteration

and modification. At other levels, appropriation simply refers to psychological investment and bodily involvement in a place rather than control and transformation. In this sense, what is appropriated is not the physical place per se, but the meanings and relationships that have been established with it (Korosec-Serfaty, 1985; Graumann, 1978).

Appropriation implies a dialectic. Meanings are not always given as "part" of the environment, but are negotiated. Equally, home is not something that is defined by the individual outside the affordances of the material environment. Therefore, an understanding of home requires not only insight into the meanings of home, but how these meanings come about. The literature on the relationship between individuals and the physical objects of the world is wide (James, 1890; Simmel 1978; Furby, 1978; Goffman, 1951; Graumann, 1975). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1982) offer a number of insights into this issue. They suggest that the basis of the person-home transaction involves a duality of structure:

"Like some strange race of cultural gastropods, people build homes out of their own essence, shells to shelter their personality. But then, these symbolic projections react on their creators, in turn shaping the selves they are" (p138).

In this way, a person acts on, and is acted upon by, the physical context of the home, where the experience of dwelling has both active and passive qualities. A number of mechanisms for the appropriation of meaning can be suggested:

Appropriation through usage. The way we use different places and objects has implications for the experience of dwelling. To know a place implies the appropriation of that place by the individual. The use of a particular place will result in a person gaining knowledge of a place, of its potentials and limitations. The habitual use of a place predicates familiarity, an intimate and unreflective relationship with a place. Thus, the unintended consequences of one's actions are the transformation of the self, that is an investment of the self in the relationship with a thing or place. The significance of this mode of appropriation is demonstrated in people's reactions to being "burglarized" (sic) (Korosec-Serfaty, 1985). Simply through the burglars being in the house and touching the objects inside, by "sniffing about", the dwellers feel that the burglars have appropriated their homes. The dwellers feel that the home is no longer their sole domain.

Cultivation. Appropriation, however, is not independent



of the purposes of the individual. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1982) use the term cultivation to describe the nature of the person-home transaction (cf. Rochberg-Halton, 1979). They suggest that home is:

"... constituted through time by the objective patterns of psychic activity that people invest in different areas of the house, in different objects, and in different activities. Thus the home is a goal or intention that becomes realized through the attention the inhabitants give it" (p138).

The person is passive in the sense that meanings are brought into consciousness through the activation of latent memories by objects and places. However, cultivation is a matter of "tending" in the sense of "watching over", and also in the sense of intending towards some aim.

General meanings. The meanings that are associated with a place need not always be a matter of negotiation with that specific place, as certain meanings may be general between similar environments. Thus, a new house will still have certain qualities that define that place as home for the dweller. These meanings may be "learned" in social and cultural contexts, they may have developed within personal experience, or they may be directly perceived in Gibson's sense.

The meanings associated with home environments have already been covered to a large extent in the earlier survey of the literature, which pointed to such issues as privacy, territoriality, and emotional ties. The discussion in this section has been to provide insights into the way these meanings accrue to a particular place that is home. Affordances represent a non-causal theory of person-environment interaction. Experiences of home develop from, but are not defined by, the affordances offered by the physical context. Instead, the individual appropriates meanings through the transaction with the place. This can be visualized as layers of meaning or functions, superimposed on the basic template of the affordance structure.

Using this framework it is possible to draw together many of the different themes within the literature on home. At a basic level, the affordance of "insideness" defines home as a place of shelter. Inside is safety and warmth, outside are dangers and the elements. However, there are other layers of meaning beyond this. For example, Korosec-Serfaty shows that the tensions of invisible/visible, secret and known, personal and social that are parallel to the inside/outside tension. Seamon (1979) notes other functions related to the insideness of the house: regeneration, "at-easeness", and psychological warmth.

One can also understand Cooper's (1972) image of "home as a symbol of self" in terms of a self/non-self tension, as the home has an important function in defining who we are, both in terms of our social self (visible) and secret, personal self (invisible). One could also suggest other examples, such as family/others or individual/collective.

The transaction between person and place is circumscribed by the affordance structure of the house. The control that the dweller has over the inside affords particular activities and ways of using the home, thus predicating personally significant meanings through a process of appropriation. The house can be seen as a barrier between the person and the world, where the home is, in both material and psychological terms, the particular domain of the person in the context of an external world (Norberg-Schultz, 1972). This perspective is central to "Poetics of Space", Bachelard's (1969) classic psychoanalysis of home and dwelling (cf. Korosec-Serfaty, 1984). In his "topoanalysis. . . of the sites of our intimate lives", the home is seen as the "non-I that protects the I". The significance of the house is that it is a place of revery:

". . . if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters



daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace. . . the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle of this integration is the daydream. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at time opposing, at others stimulating one another. In the life of men, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unchanging. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world. Before he is 'cast into the world'. . . man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle" (Bachelard, 1969, 6-7).

It is sometimes difficult to see beyond Bachelard's personal eulogy of the home. Nevertheless, Poetics of Space provides important insights. The house in a metaphorical sense, corresponds to human consciousness: the cellar corresponds to the obscure and the pre-conscious, while the attic corresponds to conscious and the rational. The home is also a material and psychological "shell" in which we dwell and find "maximum repose". Moreover, as with a mollusc, "one

must live to build one's house, and not build one's house to live in" (p106). In this way the home becomes a storehouse of our being and a symbol of the continuity of self. Through revery in the solitude of home, we can gain access to our essential being in terms of the memories and daydreams of the home/shell that reflect our being. Thus, in a way that is more than metaphorical, the home is a focus of individual being (cf. Heidegger, 1971; Korosec-Serfaty, 1985)

#### OLD AGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERIENCE.

The transactional perspective emphasises the role of individuals in defining their environmental experience. That is the individual is an acting subject who formulates goals, and acts upon them, and who finds and invests meanings in their everyday experiences. Although home is defined by the individual, this does not mean that home is an idiosyncratic phenomenon. In broad terms, individual actions and meanings are contextualised in the wider circumstances of the individual. Thus, the characteristics associated with ageing, such as increasing frailty or decline in income, and how these changes are dealt with, should have implications for the way old people value and experience their homes. It is important to make these

characteristics of ageing explicit, as the third component of the transactional model of the person-home relationship.

In experiential terms, ageing has no precise definition. It is a term that is simply understood and used intuitively by people to describe their experiences. Phenomenologically, it is necessary to look beneath this taken-for-granted construct to examine the fundamental meanings of the ageing process. Ainlay and Redfoot (1982) suggest that many influential theories of ageing have ignored the experiential dimension by "objectifying" ageing in terms of categories only meaningful to social scientists. Ageing is often typified as a series of static "life stages", defined by particular situational imperatives outside the control of the person. For example, activity theory (Rose, 1968; Rosow, 1974) objectifies identity by seeing people as objects acted on by social processes, whereby ageing is a matter of role loss. Functionalist theories, such as disengagement theory (Cumming and Henry, 1961) also define ageing as a predominantly social process, in that identity is a matter of internalizing social and cultural structures. From this perspective, old age is an inevitable stage in life, where the individual and society are involved in a process of mutually beneficial separation. In terms of personal development, Freudian theories of ageing



(Buhler and Massarik, 1968) define the individual as more or less a product of instinctual forces, although Erikson (1959) also stresses the social dimension of the ageing process. More recent perspectives on ageing, however, have come to terms with role of the individual in the process of ageing. For example, Gergen, (1980, 39) argues:

"If the individual is capable of self-direction, and may through symbolization direct his or her activities down an infinity of paths, the likelihood of universal life-span trajectories is considerably diminished".

An understanding of the individual experience of old age requires a phenomenological approach (Baltes and Schaie, 1973). Ainsley and Redfoot (1982) go some way to providing such a perspective, and point to two phenomenologically valid dimensions of ageing: the biological and the social. These are important aspects of "objectivist" approaches, but from a phenomenological perspective attention is given to the meanings that are attached to changes within them. For example, biological ageing is discussed in terms of embodiment, or the subjective "body image" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The focus is, then, on the experience of bodily processes and external life events:

Bodily existence. The body is the individual's access to the world. The world is the lifeworld centred upon the individual, and through the body, one is situated in the world, both physically and socially. Ainlay and Redfoot (1982) argue that "at the bottom line, the ageing process is rooted in biological processes". As human beings, we are biological entities, bounded by the realities of a physical existence. Changes in our personal capabilities and faculties are fundamental to the experience of "growing old". One must also consider the symbolic qualities of this. While ageing may be rooted in the biological domain, the knowledge of bodily change and the meanings associated with them only emerge within the individual's consciousness.

Life changes. A number of authors (Bandura, 1975; Brim and Ryff, 1980; Starr, 1983) have argued that it is necessary to focus on the concrete life events of people. For them, "ageing" becomes an analysis of how people interpret and respond to the changes within their experiential world. The dynamic of this is reflexive, in that changes or events can originate from the individual's own actions, as well as from external sources. This framework should not be seen as a scientific "objectivism", but as framework for understanding individual experience. The significance of "life events" is not a matter of "external" factors impinging upon the individual. Rather, it is how people

subjectively make sense of the world, how they generate the reality of change in terms of "life events", and how they respond to these changes as objective "facts" (Gubrium and Buckholdt, 1977; Starr, 1983). This emphasises the role of the individual in shaping his "lifeworld", rather passively reacting to events, and prompts us to examine how the people themselves initiate change through choices which directly alter their lived environment. Indeed, people are not just coping with situations and life events, but are projecting a coherent "self" in the way they act in, and transform, their world (Starr, 1983).

Embodiment and life changes can be seen as the "objective givens" of growing older, that is they define the circumstances of old age. However, these circumstances are contextualized within the biography of the individual, that is the temporal quality of past and future. Specifically, the past is significant in terms of personal experience, while the future is dominated by an awareness of death.

Personal experience. The issue of remembering and reminiscence has been a major focus of gerontological work (cf. Coleman, 1986), and the idea of the "life review" (Butler, 1963) defines this as the major dimension of psychological development in later life. A key issue relates to self in autobiographical terms.



One has a sense of having a history, of having individuality. In the face of old age, coming to terms with one's past can be a necessary component of coping with the final phases of life (Butler, 1963; Erikson, 1968). One's memories also have an "objective" quality in terms of "experience". The present is the most significant "reality", but we live within multiple realities, that also include past and present, fact and fantasy. The awareness of the past in terms of memories is an important aspect of ageing that provides stability and continuity within a changing world, and has implications for how people perceive, experience and value their physical environment.

Awareness of death. Liebermann and Tobin (1983) suggest that most perspectives have missed fundamental qualities of old age because theoreticians have imposed "values" from early life on the issue of ageing. In particular,

"When one is in one's seventies or eighties an awareness that one has lived a lifetime is unavoidable; the elderly approach the present and the future from this special perspective. The sense of personal finitude is real and palpable. . . We believe that the psychology of old age cannot be understood unless one takes into account this particular perspective on life as well as the age-linked assaults that are intrinsic to what it

means to become old" (Liebermann and Tobin, 1983, 347).

The sense of personal finitude is perhaps the unique quality of old age. Although this awareness may not dominate the consciousness of the older individual, it remains as an organising focus for the way they live their lives. This issue is addressed more fully in Chapter 9.

In this brief discussion of the concept of ageing, the emphasis has been to move away from an "objectivist" view of ageing, to one that focuses on the meanings that "ageing" has for the individual. This is not suggesting that other theories are "wrong", but that it is important to develop perspectives that acknowledges the role of individuals in defining and determining their own experiences, and in the present context the role within the person-environment transaction.

As with some of the theories of ageing, theories of person-environment interaction in later life have tended to ignore the role of the individual. Rowles (1978) sees the dominant image of geographic experience in old age as a "closing circle" of:

"...geographical lifespace constriction, expressed in terms of declining personal capabilities,

increasing environmental constraints, and intensified affinity with the immediate setting. .  
."

Academic work has emphasised spatial constriction and accompanying physical, social, and psychological withdrawal, derived from increased personal restriction and progressive environmental constraint. Personal restriction is associated with varying degrees of physiological deterioration, selective changes in psychological capabilities and an often crippling loss in social role and status. Environmental constraints are also significant: the built and natural environment are often hazardous to older people; poverty can restrict action by precluding options; transportation problems and an increasing locational differentiation can reduce the potential for interaction; negative societal attitudes often preclude social interaction.

This negative emphasis is apparent in some of the more influential approaches used to examine the person-environment relationship in old age. For example, M. Powell Lawton's (1982) ecological model is defined in terms of the characteristics and capabilities (competence) of the individual, and the demands and properties of the environment, termed environmental press (Murray, 1938). The ecological theme is developed further in the concept of "adaptation level". This is



based on the assertion that the individual will adapt to some stimulus in a way that the sensation of stimulation is minimised. However, this is partly determined by the competence of the individual:

" . . . high competence is associated with relative independence of the individual from the behavioural effects of environmental press, while low competence implies heightened vulnerability to environmental press. . . . people of lowered competence. . . . have difficulty coping with the demands of marginally adequate environments" (Lawton, 1982).

Lawton's model is general, but can be seen as pertinent to the elderly, where competence levels are characteristically declining. The principles involved in Lawton's model are explicit in the closely related concept of person-environment congruence or "fit" (French et al, 1974; Kahana, 1974, 1982; Carp and Carp, 1984). French and associates (1974, p316) define the notion as the "goodness of fit between the characteristics of the person and the environment". The discrepancies between the individual (motives and competence) and the environment (resources and demands) is defined as "stress". As in Lawton's model, these discrepancies require some form of adaptive behaviour, and as Rapoport (1982) points out, the major adaptive

mechanism is "habitat selection", where the individual moves to an environment that is more congruent with their needs. For example, stress can be seen to exist when environmental demands exceed personal competence, and one would expect an individual in such a situation to adjust, in order to optimise the fit between the two dimensions, such as a move to a more instrumentally supportive environment. Coping with such situations can also be a matter of "environmental mastery" and "defence" (French et al, 1974). At a very general level, the "goodness of fit" produced by these adaptive behaviours is related to the well-being of the individual. Where congruence is high, then this leads to maximum satisfaction, while a negative outcome can be assumed for people who must remain in a "dissonant" environment.

The notion of "congruence" can be seen as a metaphor that is used as a conceptual aid. This metaphor has a whole set of conceptual entailments (such as stress) that define the environmental experience in later life in negative terms. This is not to say that some older people do not experience "stressful" situations, but one cannot be justified in applying it to all older people, as if it was a universal experience.

Rowles (1978) is critical of the negative image of

environmental experience in old age. Firstly he argues that spatial restriction is not an inevitable part of growing older, and goes on to present evidence to refute most of the deterministic, stereotypical images of the "closing circle". Secondly, he suggests that insufficient attention has been given to the very creative responses that elderly people make to their changing circumstances. This emphasises the role of individual consciousness and action, and raises questions about the universality of patterns of ageing and the restriction of geographical lifespace. Rowles asserts that progressive "lifespace closure" is only one of many possible relationships between an older person and the environmental context.

Rowles' emphasis is on the self-development of the individual within the context of a changing world. In his empirical work on the geographical experience of older people, he showed that participants related to their environmental context in highly individualistic ways, that reflect both the personality and the autobiography of the individual as well as the contingencies of the physical world.

Nevertheless, Rowles suggests that it is possible to make some structural generalizations about the environmental experience of older people. He admits that within the domain of action, the deterioration of



physical capabilities tends to lead to spatial constriction, with an increased behavioural and affective emphasis on proximate spatial zones, such as the home. However, there are other domains of environmental experience, such as fantasy, which can be expanded as the physical domain contracts. Thus, there may be an increased emphasis on reminiscence and vicarious geographical experience that follows on from the older person's reduced physical capability. These latter issues represent the positive and creative ways people can approach old age. Furthermore, environmental experience can be defined as much by the person's own interpretation of the situation as it is by external physical circumstances.

#### SUMMARY.

There were two objectives behind this chapter. Firstly, an overview of the literature on home was presented, focusing on both the general issue of the person-home relationship and the more specific case of the elderly. Although the literature reflects many different perspectives, a number of general observations about home can be made, which have a bearing on the conceptualization and analysis of home experience.

i. "Home" can have many different meanings as illustrated in the diverse literature.

ii. Home is experientially complex and, as borne out in empirical studies, home can mean different things to different people, and can mean different things to the same person at different times.

iii. Although complex, many of the individual meanings are interrelated and reflect more fundamental structures of home experience.

The second objective was to define an appropriate framework for the examination of the person-home relationship in later life. A transactional model was proposed, involving three related components:

i. The meanings of home derives from the basic affordances of the physical environment, such as the affordances of insideness and control.

ii. The various meanings of home are gained through appropriation. Many of these meanings will accrue through usage of the home environment, while some may be directly perceived. Other meanings may be appropriated through processes of personal and social signification.

iii. The affordance structure circumscribes the

experience of home, but if home is a product of the transaction between person and place, then home must also be characteristic of the dweller. Four dimensions of the ageing process were defined as pertinent to this issue: embodiment; life changes; personal experience; awareness of death.



## Chapter 3

AN EMPIRICAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF HOME: PRINCIPLES AND  
METHOD.

## INTRODUCTION.

The object of the present research is to gain insight and understanding into the geographical experience of older people. As already argued, phenomenology provides an appropriate epistemological and ontological framework for this kind of work. However, the inductive, interpretative nature of the approach presents a number of problems. To what extent are the results generalizable across different people? To what extent does the researcher's own subjective preconceptions influence the outcomes of the research? It is argued here that phenomenological and empirical approaches are not antithetical, and as long as its central principles are maintained, phenomenological research can benefit from a more rigorous empirical framework.

There are two objectives behind this chapter. The first is to outline the minimum methodological requirements of an empirical phenomenology (Sixsmith and Sixsmith, 1987). This involves finding a common ground between phenomenological research on the one hand and empirical, "mainstream" research on the other. The second objective is to describe how these principles were used as the basis for the present investigation into home experience in later life. Attention is given

to the general research strategy, together with details of the specific research protocols that were used. A final section gives details of how the field work was undertaken.

#### AN EMPIRICAL PHENOMENOLOGY.

Although there seems to be as many phenomenologies as there are phenomenologists (Sixsmith, 1983), the approach in general has been gaining ground amongst social scientists. For example, Shotter (1982) has argued for an interpretative, descriptive psychology (Davis, 1981) on the basis that:

" . . . we already know what it is to be a human being. . . . we already know from the inside what it is like to act from a belief, etc. , or what is involved in behaving in certain ways. . . ".

The task is to put these intersubjective understandings into an appropriate interpretative structure which does not:

" . . . obscure, distort, or otherwise ignore the actual classes of mental phenomena given us in our experience" (Davis, 1981).



However, in some ways, phenomenology can be seen as being at odds with empirical social science. Phenomenology is a matter of "inner perception" (Shotter, 1982; Brentano, 1973), and in a purist sense, the interpretation of experience ultimately demands self-reflection by the researcher (Husserl, 1960; Carr, 1975). This subjective orientation has not always endeared itself within the perspective of an "objective", empirical social science. For instance, it is not usually possible to replicate or test the outcomes of phenomenological research. hence, it may be expedient to "harden" the phenomenological approach by incorporating an overtly empirical perspective. The underlying assumption here is that empirical social science and phenomenology are not irreconcilable. As Sardello (1978) puts it:

". . . the empirical turn in phenomenological psychology is perhaps the most challenging to this new direction in psychology and it is also the most controversial since the methodological atomism of empirical psychology seems far removed from the critical, holistic approach of phenomenology. As long as an empirical approach is understood as an attitude, a perspective, a way of looking, such an orientation is not antithetical to phenomenology".

Recently, there has been a trend towards a rigorous and empirical approach within humanistic geography (cf. Smith, 1981; Eyles, 1986), based on a recognition that if the approach is "to be more than ephemeral. . . it must demonstrate its worth by showing the relevance of its ideas in carrying out substantive pieces of research" (Eyles, 1986, p2). As Eyles (1986) emphasises, humanists need to go beyond theoretical abstractions and actually talk to real people. Obviously, this has methodological implications. Unfortunately, one of the criticisms of the humanistic approach is that it is methodologically immature (Johnston, 1979; Smith 1981). Humanistic geographers have tended to employ any intuitive 'method' which "gets into the mind" (Entrekin, 1976), leaving themselves open to accusations of gross subjectivism (Gregory, 1978; Pred, 1983; Sixsmith, 1983; Sayer, 1979)

Although continued development of humanistic approaches throughout the 1980's have improved this situation (cf. Eyles, 1986; Harper et al, 1988), there is still a need to establish and develop research strategies and techniques that synthesize phenomenological and empirical principles. An 'empirical phenomenology' must meet certain minimum requirements of phenomenological research and 'mainstream' social science.

Within phenomenology there are basic concepts which define certain minimum methodological requirements. Firstly, it is invalid to pursue the traditional subject-object dualism which separates the 'external' physical world from the 'internal' mental world. Rather, the man-environment relationship is intentional, where both domains constitute one another. All human consciousness emanates from the source "me" to the focus "object", so that there can be no consciousness without consciousness OF something. Secondly, the object of phenomenological investigation is to explore and understand the intentional consciousness that constitutes human experience. This analysis of experience reveals the pure structure of the world as expressed in shared, or intersubjective, meanings. Meaning is what is there for the person when they confront the world:

"We allow what we see to teach us to comprehend the seen as opposed to forcing our comprehension of the seen to determine our seeing" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Thus, as a method, phenomenology must take and describe the experience of lived phenomena, and through collaboration and intersubjective validation, seek to reveal their fundamental structure in terms of meanings. "Phenomena" are all the things experienced by people,



whether or not they are formally acknowledged facts or mentalistic abstractions. Moreover, there is no presupposition that significant phenomena are given "facts" in the world. Simply, phenomenology seeks to "explicate the sense this world has for us all, prior to any philosophizing and obviously gets solely from our experience a sense which philosophy can uncover, but never alter" (Husserl, 1960). But phenomenology is not simply descriptive of the 'things' in the world; it is the meaning of things that constitute our experience. Therefore, phenomenology must go beyond the surface of 'things', to reflect on our experience of them. Bearing all this in mind, Husserl (1950) suggests that the phenomenological method should be:

- i. presuppositionless
- ii. non-speculative
- iii. descriptive of the phenomena as they are experienced
- iv. empirical and scientific as a method
- v. generalizable across situations.

#### The Requirements for an Empirical Approach.

An empirical phenomenology must take into account Husserl's basic principles. Given these restrictions, several procedures commonly used to investigate meanings

can be rejected as approaches to empirical phenomenology. The semantic differential (Osgood et al, 1957) presents participants with a prescribed set of adjectives which are assumed to be relevant and interpreted in a similar way by everyone. This may mask important individual differences and personal meanings, a criticism which can also be levelled at the repertory grid technique (Bannister and Fransella, 1971), when used with supplied constructs (Canter et al, 1976). Even as a method of eliciting personal constructs, this approach has some problems, for instance, it assumes that constructs are bi-polar and hierarchically related (Kelly, 1955).

A less constricting method for generating descriptive experiential data is the open-ended interview. For example, Harre and Secord (1972) propose an accounts methodology based on open-ended interviews, recognizing that people create, assess and use their own meanings. This does not imply that accounts should be uncritically accepted, but that "the phenomena which they purport to report both really exist and are relevant" (Harre and Secord, 1972). Open-ended methods have also been developed within empirical psychology from an explicitly phenomenological perspective (cf. Fischer, 1978; Giorgi, 1971). However, there are a number of conceptual and practical problems associated with this kind of approach.

One problem that may detract from the validity of experiential research is the ambivalence of what people say during interviews. Totally open-ended interview data sets up the assumption that the data is 'pure', reflecting psychological truths. But do these allow access to 'truth' given that the person is not a tape recorder playing back personal experiences? During the research interview, the respondent is telling his experiences to another person, with all the overtones of what is socially acceptable guiding the way events are told (Shotter, 1981). Moreover, autobiographical accounts should be seen, to some extent, as representations of the past, defined in terms of what is relevant to the person's present concerns (Kohli, 1981; Gagnon, 1981; Lyons, 1984). Thus, 'truth' has a subjective character that needs to be carefully evaluated.

A further problem is that many experiences are pre-conscious and must present difficulties of recall and expression. This is a particular problem for the present research into home experience, where the subject for discussion, the home, is usually a taken-for-granted part of everyday life. Furthermore, are the expressions used by people actually descriptive of their inner experiences, or are they mere labels? For instance, what does somebody really mean when they say that they have a feeling of 'belonging'. Unfortunately, it is often



impossible to get beyond this basic expression.

There are also practical difficulties associated with this sort of approach in that it generates a vast amount of unstructured data, which presents a formidable challenge to the researcher. Moreover, much of this data is likely to be irrelevant or ambiguous, representing wasted time for both researcher and participant, while making it more difficult to extract the pertinent points. Clearly, what is needed is a systematic framework for collecting data, which maximises researcher efficiency, while still allowing people's freedom of expression.

This type of research demands a great deal from participants in terms of their capacity for self-analysis and expression. The role of the researcher is to facilitate this process, and therefore there is always a need to build up and maintain a rapport with participants. Without a framework for establishing a dialogue, it is necessary to embark on a long-term intensive process of exploration of the pertinent issues. This can be very time consuming for both researcher and participant.

There also seems to be a tension between intensive and extensive research designs and what may be required is a framework that can bridge the two. For example, it

is not usually possible to 'do' phenomenology with a lot of people. If a common ground is to be established, then it may be valuable to incorporate larger samples than might normally be used in interpretative research. Larger samples would make it easier to pinpoint shared meanings between people, and at the same time make it more difficult for the researcher to impose their own preconceptions.

This last issue points to a major difficulty in establishing a common ground between phenomenology and empirical social science: the validity of subjective accounts. In an empirical phenomenology, the researcher has, through empathetic understanding, the role of communicating the experience of others. In this sense, phenomenology is still a self-analysis by the researcher. However, through reflection, the results should be universally applicable, that is intersubjective- 'the sense the world has for us all' (Husserl, 1960). On this point, phenomenological literature is persuasive in principle, but has proved less than satisfactory in practice.

The basic problem is how can one justify the interpretation that is put on the data? To what extent are these interpretations a function of the researcher's own bias and predilections. This question is something of a red herring, in that it assumes that there is such

a thing as scientific 'truth', and that there are ways in which this reality can be objectively measured. However, an empirical-phenomenological approach can ameliorate problems of subjectivism through "triangulation" (Denzin, 1970; Eyles, 1986; Trend 1978), which involves a multiple research strategy, in order to substantiate conclusions and theoretical claims. Also, one should consider that the extent to which qualitative research is "scientifically" acceptable depends very much upon the rigour of the research methods. There are many aspects of conventional empirical enquiry that can be usefully brought to bear on qualitative research. To have as many case studies as possible, selected on a controlled basis may add to the breadth of the research perspective. It may be valuable to use small-scale extensive studies as a back-up or starting point for in-depth research. This is not just a matter of paying lip-service to statistical logic, in a very real way it can add to insight into a problem and may serve to substantiate conclusions.

Having undertaken a considerable amount of qualitative research, the present author believes that one of the most significant indicators of the accuracy or relevance of a theory or explanation lies in people's reactions to the outcome. Simply, an account is only valid if a subject feels that it accurately reflects their own beliefs. Alkin et al (1979) presented the



results of each case study to the people involved, and incorporated their comments in the research report. This is a matter of taking people's own beliefs seriously, without attempting to impose exogenous explanatory structures; people are indeed the experts on themselves (Kelly, 1955; Harre and Secord, 1972). Given the aims of empirical phenomenology, it is important that the meanings and interpretations of phenomena are a matter of negotiation between the researcher and the participant.

#### Defining an Empirical Phenomenology.

As pointed out earlier, there are a number of difficulties associated with phenomenological research. However, the comments on validity indicates that many of these problems can be overcome. All these issues along with the prerequisites for phenomenological research can be used to define the methodological requirements for an empirical phenomenology. Although this may be seen as compromising some of the principles of phenomenology, the main objective is pragmatic: to make the path to understanding people's meanings and experiences as direct as possible within the constraints of a typical social science research program. Given the above considerations there is a need for a research method that will:

- i. Fulfil the basic requirements of phenomenological method.
- ii. Guide participants into systematic self-analysis.
- iii. Ameliorate the problem of establishing rapport.
- iv. Provide a medium for participants to express themselves.
- v. Minimise the possibility for researcher intrusion.
- vi. Increase researcher efficiency.
- vii. Allow larger samples to be managed.
- viii. Allow the validation of results.
- ix. Reduce the time/effort load on participants and researcher.

These requirements were used to define the general research strategy of the project and the specific tools for investigating home experience in later life. The research strategy and the practical design of the fieldwork are discussed in the remaining sections of this chapter.

## RESEARCH STRATEGY.

The research methodology obviously needs to be appropriate to the problem at hand. As Bolton (1984) notes, "the trick is to know the proper relation between concept and method". In the present case, the approach is defined by the nature of the subject and the methodological requirements of empirical phenomenology. The issue of home experience in later life was to be evaluated by adopting two approaches:

i. Extensive design. The initial basis of the research was to be a fairly large scale survey of people's attitudes towards their homes. It was felt that it would be possible to include a sample that would allow some basic statistical treatments. The outcome would be a general overview of the pertinent issues.

ii. Intensive design. This would involve the use of a few case studies, in order to gain an in-depth insight into the issues emerging during the research. This stage would be largely independent of the extensive research. However, as the analysis of the data from the extensive research progressed, the generalised results could be critically examined in the light of actual experience.

To some extent, the approach is a reversal of conventional research practice. Usually, one moves from an intensive, exploratory study (the pilot stage) to an



extensive study on which generalizations are founded. Bertaux (1982) suggests that depending on the aims of the research, this is not always the appropriate direction, and that the intensive design is a valuable way of validating and justifying the outcomes of extensive research. This was a significant consideration in the present study. It was felt that if generalizations and theories were to be generated by the research, then they should at least be shown to be relevant to actual situations.

It is in the nature of this kind of research that the approach is inductive, holistic and naturalistic (Patton, 1980). The research instruments should not constrain participants to predefined response structures, while the actual investigation is as open-ended and flexible as possible, in order to portray people's experiences and meanings as faithfully as possible. This inductive approach contrasts with the hypothetico-deductive approach which requires the specification of variables and hypotheses of the relationships between variables prior to investigation. The objective is to allow the relevant issues to emerge without presupposing the structure or content of those issues. The research must also aim to be holistic, in that complete picture must be presented. Variables, cannot be isolated and the emphasis must be on understanding the totality rather than the component

parts. Data collection must attempt to be exhaustive, until all relevant issues have been explored. The approach must also be naturalistic. In one sense this means an inductive approach, but also this involves understanding situations in their contexts. Compared with conventional survey designs or experimental approaches, qualitative investigations cannot always follow a precisely defined pattern, except in a very general strategic sense. Bearing this in mind, the research was approached in the following manner.

#### The Pilot Stage.

The initial stage of the research involved conversations with older people about their home experiences. These consisted of both pre-arranged interviews and informal discussions with four older people that were known to the researcher. The objective of these conversations was to attempt to gain direct insight into the meanings that home had for older people, rather than to simply rely upon academic literature. This would also help to distil the most pertinent issues in a very wide problem area.

Up to this point the major problem was the multiplicity of theories and concepts that could be brought to bear upon the problem. Although the

methodological impetus of phenomenology is to be entirely inductive, it is unlikely that any research can be presuppositionless (Sixsmith, 1983). For example, interviewing or discussion is social interaction. The researcher, however "objective", will bring preconceived notions to bear, while participants will tend to tell what they think is socially desirable. Although continued investigation will ameliorate this problem it can never be eliminated. Also, to be presuppositionless can also be very inefficient in terms of research outcomes. Existing concepts and theories (lay or academic) should not be discounted. The early conversations with older people provided an essential foil to the review of the literature in identifying the major problem areas within the research domain. This provided the basis for developing a questionnaire on housing experience in later life.

The questionnaire consisted of both open-ended questions and a few questions that involved scaled responses. A number of areas were covered, such as: home in its biographical context; changes and needs in later life; person-house congruence. The questionnaire also included the following instruments: a housing biography; a "yesterday" diary (Parkes and Thrift, 1980); a "personal projects" schedule (Little, 1983); the PGC morale scale (Lawton, 1975). The questionnaire was piloted with six participants at the start of the



field work phase in Newcastle. The interviews brought about a number of reactions from the participants:

i. People were often perplexed by the length and scope of the questionnaire. Most could not imagine what would be done with the the material, and that a book could be written on the basis of the interview.

ii. More seriously, respondents found some questions irrelevant and difficult to comprehend. Although this could be expected in any sort of research, the irrelevance of questions reflected the researcher's own preconceptions regarding both home experience and old age. The reality was somewhat different to what had been understood through academic sources.

iii. Many of the answers that people gave seemed to provoke unsatisfactory responses, which did not seem to be rich in the detail that is apparent in other comparative studies. This may have been due to the characteristics of the small pilot sample, but equally, the questionnaire may have been uninspiring or too extensive. Certainly, the use of direct questions to elicit feelings, emotions and memories is questionable in a "cold start" situation.

The outcome of the pilot stage was a radical review of the questionnaire and the direction of the research

itself. It was felt that the questionnaires in themselves would only provide very limited insights, and that more emphasis would have to be placed on other methods. In the light of these considerations, the following research protocol was developed and used:

- i. Interviewing
- ii. Multiple Sorting Task
- iii. Case studies.

#### Interviewing.

It was intended that the formal questionnaires would play two roles. Firstly, they would provide the basic database of the study. Secondly, the questionnaires would provide the initial stage in a more in-depth investigation. Although a great deal of effort was aimed at defining a theoretical base prior to the fieldwork, there was a need throughout this phase to develop and refine concepts and methods as the research progressed. Hence, data collection and analysis had to be undertaken together. For example, the initial phase of interviewing suggested a number of emergent themes that required more detailed exploration. Hence, it was essential that a flexible approach should be adopted which would extend the research beyond the questionnaire study.

i. Initial interview. The initial interview involved using a modified version of the original questionnaire, although remaining a fairly strict schedule of standardized questions (Appendix 1). The pilot study prompted the removal of a number of sections from the original questionnaire and the development of others. The following issues were covered:

Home experience in its biographical context. How does a participant's personal history and experience of housing affect their present requirements and preferences?

The subjective experience of home. What are the basic meanings of home for the participants?

Home and getting older. Does getting older have implications for the ways in which people experience their homes?

Staying put. How attached are people to their homes and what is the basis of this attachment?

Moving. Have participants considered moving, and what would be the personal implications of their moving?

The geographical lifeworld. What are the characteristics of participants' wider geographical



experience and how does their home fit into this?

Advantages and disadvantages of house and neighbourhood.

How happy are people with their present housing circumstances?

The personal and social background. This included details on life history, social links and psychological well-being.

ii. Follow-up interviews. These were used for a deeper investigation of specific issues that arose from the analysis of initial interviews with participants. Hence, many of these interviews were specific to the participant and were not based on standard questions, which would hopefully allow greater insight into the personal meanings, motives and experiences of the participants. The approach was entirely open-ended allowing issues to be fully explored.

iii. Evaluation interviews. These interviews were aimed at consolidating information gained in earlier interviews. It was felt that participants should be aware of what had been concluded from previous interviews. Not only is this important from an ethical point of view, but it also allows a degree of verification of the findings. In practice, this aspect of the research was very important, allowing

misunderstandings and mistaken conclusions to be rectified. Also, participants would often gain greater insight into the objectives of the research and would supply information to extend or substantiate previous conclusions.

### The Multiple Sorting Task.

The multiple sorting task (MST) (Canter et al, 1985; Groat, 1982; Sixsmith and Sixsmith, 1987) was used to investigate the issue of home in the context of everyday geographical experience. The MST is based on the principle that people think about and deal with the world through categorisation. The MST is a versatile method for investigating people's conceptual systems. The objective is to help people to get behind the natural attitude of taking things for granted and to undertake rigorous self-analysis. The procedure involves sorting specific items into similar categories on the basis of a single conceptual criterion. In the present research, it was initially necessary to identify all the places that people used in their everyday lives, for example: their own homes, shopping places, places of entertainment. These were used as the items for sorting according to particular dimensions. For example, places could be evaluated according to how important they are to the person. Once this has been done, further

criteria are defined and provide the basis for further sorting. This continues until all possible criteria have been exhausted.

At the end of the procedure, the participant will have undergone a systematic self-evaluation of the way they conceive the phenomena of their experience. A major advantage of the method is that participants are involved in the interpretation of their own experiences, emphasising the expertise of the individual in respect to themselves (Kelly, 1955). The continual process of categorizing, explaining and justifying forces participants into a self-conscious analysis of their own everyday experiences, thus getting behind the 'natural attitude' to things. In this respect, the MST has advantages over in-depth interviewing. The following quotation from a participant justifies this claim:

"... the interviews were easy, that was just answering questions. But this (the MST) was more difficult. Things you take for granted just don't hold up. I think I've learnt more about myself from doing it".

### Case Studies.

The use of case studies (cf. Yin, 1984) was essential to



the research in order to understand complex phenomena. This is achieved by maintaining holistic view of the meaningful characteristics of real life events and experiences, rather than reducing phenomena to isolated parts. The case study approach can be seen as being at the idiographic extreme of the extensive-intensive spectrum of research approaches. Because of the intensive nature of case study research, it is not possible to accommodate a large number of cases. Statistical inference cannot be used, and generalizations cannot be made in respect to populations or universes. However, the depth of understanding allowed by case study research allows analytical generalization. Hence, case studies provide the basis for substantive research. Case studies are essential in order to access certain types of data. During the research it became apparent that many of the most significant aspects of home experience were not accessible through discussion or reportage. For example, home is often a place of cherished memories, where the physical environment provides cues for remembering. The processes that underlie this phenomenon needed to be observed in situ. Thus, it was necessary to cultivate a long standing relationship with a few participants so that the relevant situations could be directly observed and evaluated.

### Comparison Groups.

It was felt that in order to understand many of the issues of home experience in later life, then some form of comparison should be undertaken with other social groups. As already noted, the use of statistical logic would be necessarily very limited within the study. One should also be aware that to refer to the 'elderly' as a group, implying common characteristics and homogeneity, is a dangerous perspective. These things considered, an intergroup comparison would have to be treated very circumspectly. Nevertheless, the value of this approach would be to highlight characteristics of home experience that are related to circumstances that are associated with advanced years. Comparison groups were defined on the basis of whether people were unemployed or in full time unemployment. Unemployed people had certain characteristics that are similar to the elderly; absence of paid work; lower levels of income. The similarities and differences between the compared groups may serve to highlight how particular life circumstances might have a bearing on people's experience of home. To this end, younger employed and unemployed people from Heaton and Scotswood were asked to perform the multiple sorting task and to answer the questionnaire items that covered home experience in general.

## SETTING-UP THE STUDY.

The fieldwork was undertaken in Newcastle upon Tyne between September 1984 and August 1985. Newcastle was chosen because of the present researcher's familiarity with the city. Familiarity is an essential component of interpretative investigation. Ideally, ethnographic studies involve the researcher living within, and experiencing, the culture that is being investigated. On a practical level, detailed local knowledge is essential to this kind of research. This knowledge is an aid to overcoming barriers with participants. If they feel that you are "one of them", then the process becomes a lot easier. Moreover, the level of implicit local knowledge in everyday conversation can be considerable.

The research was confined to two districts of Newcastle: Heaton and Scotswood. It was appropriate that Heaton should be chosen as this is where the researcher lived. Scotswood was chosen because the researcher was already familiar with the district and had contacts living there. These two districts, in fact, offer interesting points of comparison and contrast. In both districts, a large proportion of older people live in rented accommodation. Both districts have an elderly population that is working



class. However, there are significant differences between the two, such as the high proportion of private rental accommodation in Heaton as opposed to council housing in Scotswood.

Although the intention was to interview a whole range of people over the age of sixty-five, an initial problem was the identification of potential participants in the research. This was overcome by approaching the Electoral Registration Office in Newcastle City Council, who supplied names and addresses of people aged over sixty-five in the two districts. Although the research was not intended to be a statistical exercise, it was felt that, regarding the initial interviews and multiple sorting tasks, the sampling should be undertaken as systematically as possible. Sampling was a function of two considerations.

i. Geographical location. Participants should be evenly spread across the two study areas, in order to speak to people in all types of housing circumstances.

ii. Participant characteristics. The sample was to be stratified on the following characteristics: age, sex, and marital status.

A detailed breakdown of the the characteristics of the interviewees is given in Appendix 2. Although the

sampling procedure was fairly rigorous, the actual choice of interviewee was restricted by a number of factors:

i. Many of the people on the list of names would be out. Roughly 75% would be out during the day, or did not answer the door. Interviewing was restricted to daylight hours, unless prior arrangements were made.

ii. Fitting-in the interviews was a problem. Most interviews extended over several hours, often making it difficult to fit a full interview in with the daily schedule of participants.

iii. The interviews also involved fairly personal questions, and clearly some people would be unwilling to participate when approached. People were approached directly, rather than through an introductory procedure, such as a letter of intent. Given this, the level of cooperation was very high. In Scotswood in particular, the number of people who refused to participate was minimal.

The selection of participants for the follow-up interviews and case studies was not based on a strict sampling procedure. The initial interviews served not only the purpose of data collection, but also as an introduction to potential participants for more in-depth

investigation. Selection depended on a number of interrelated considerations.

i. The willingness of people to participate further. Obviously, some people were unwilling to take the process beyond the initial interview. Also, it was important to follow-up people who seemed to have a genuine interest in what was being researched. The research required people to be willing to try and examine and analyse their own feelings and experiences.

ii. The relationship between researcher and participant. This kind of research is a social exercise, where it is necessary to build mutual trust and friendship. Obviously, this is not something that can be approached systematically.

iii. The information provided by the participant. From the initial interview, it was often the case that some people provided very little in terms of new insights into the question of home experience in later life, while others were surprisingly rich in this respect.



## APPROACHES TO DATA ANALYSIS

Participant's responses to the questionnaire were recorded as fully as possible by the researcher. Tape recordings were not generally used for pragmatic reasons: the lack of resources for transcription; some people either felt inhibited by the recorder or were uneasy about being recorded. This is not felt to detract significantly from the overall quality of the data, as the researcher has considerable expertise in conducting qualitative interviews and was able to take down responses very accurately. A number of the in-depth interviews were tape-recorded, but most were taken down on paper. This again is not seen to detract significantly from the accuracy of the accounts, nor did this interfere with the flow of the interviews.

The analysis was approached inductively, where patterns, themes and categories emerge from the data, rather than being imposed before the data was collected and analysed. The objective is to look for "natural" variations in the data (Patton, 1980), in order to develop and interpretative structure. The analysis of the data was approached in a number of ways:

## Content Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

The responses to the open-ended questions were reduced to a set of manageable conceptual categories through content analysis (cf. Krippendorff, 1980), where salient points from each person's answer were ascribed to a set of meaning categories. These categories were not predefined, but were developed from the responses by a continuous process of sorting and grouping. This initially resulted in a large number of categories, many of which were unique. However, it was usually possible to reduce the number by eliminating redundant categories and incorporating others together. The objective is to minimize the number of categories, while still maintaining the semantic integrity of the original data.

The question of validity arises here and it is important that a system of categories is corroborated by an independent rater. This was done by an independent rater reassigning the responses to the categories and then evaluating the agreement between raters (inter-rater reliability). Concurrence was high and did not fall below 85% for any of the questionnaire responses. There were three sources of disagreement: rater error; ambiguity in the data items; ambiguity in the content categories. Rater errors are not a serious problem, as these can simply be corrected once identified. Ambiguity is a more serious problem.

Disagreements due to data ambiguity were overcome by discussion between the raters. If it was not possible to agree, then the data item was excluded. Disagreements due to the ambiguity in the content categories were negotiated in order to arrive at a consistent and unambiguous system of categorisation.

### The Multiple Sorting Task

The MST was valuable for the further exploration of individuals' subjective understandings about the home environment and particularly how it integrates with other places within their geographical lifeworld. The MST required people to categorise the places they utilise according to some attribute that is meaningful to them such as: the places in which they feel most comfortable, or places which are important. The data generated by the MST are not presented formally here as this would have made the final thesis unwieldy. Rather, the MST was used as a heuristic tool for gaining a deeper insight into the emerging issues. The main benefit of the MST was to get people to talk freely about their understandings of their world. The MST contributed to the development of a dialogue between researcher and participant, the researcher's own intuitive understanding of their experiences, and the triangulation of analysis. Individual's MSTs were also



analysed using Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) techniques to provide a more systematic perspective. A detailed guide to how MDS techniques can be employed idiographically is to be found in Sixsmith and Sixsmith (1987).

### Evaluation and Follow-up Interviews

The content analysis of the questionnaire data allowed a comparative analysis to be undertaken, using simple descriptive statistics. However, it was also necessary to attempt to understand home experience from participants' own subjective perspective. This involved the development of a discourse between researcher and participant in order to mutually arrive at the significant dimensions of their home experience. The starting-point for the idiographic analysis was the participant's initial interview and MST. What the researcher felt to be the key issues in their accounts were extracted and used as the basis for further discussion. These sessions were much less structured than the initial interview. The aim was to get people to talk as freely as possible, with the issues acting as a focus of conversation, rather than as a strict question-answer interchange. These discussions allowed emerging issues to be developed further and also served to validate conclusions and interpretations made by the

researcher. The desired outcome of this process was a deeper understanding of that person's home experience.

### Case Studies

The approach to the case studies of home experience follows Patton (1980). The initial requirement of a case study is to gather a comprehensive data set for each participant. This can be in a number of forms, including: interviews; direct observation; documentation; participant observation; "yesterday" diaries; MST. In the present study, all these data sources were used, although the emphasis was upon account gathering and observation. Triangulation, using these multiple methods, was important in ensuring the validity of the researcher's interpretations (cf. Denzin, 1978).

Analysis proceeded by developing a case record for each participant, where the basic data was edited into a more concise form by eliminating redundancies and organising and reorganising the data into themes. As with the follow-up interviews these themes were used as the starting point for further research and as the basis for discussion and negotiation in order to arrive at a mutual understanding between researcher and participant. The case studies allowed this process to be undertaken

in greater depth, in a continuous process of exploration, conceptual refinement and critique (cf. Rowles 1978). Finally, the case records were used as a basis for writing a case study narrative. These narratives provide, in a form accessible to the reader, all the information needed to understand the home experience of the individual cases.



## Chapter 4.

### MEANINGS OF HOME.

## INTRODUCTION.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an initial analysis of participants' understanding of their experience of home. The emergent themes will be examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters. As already pointed out in Chapter 2, "home" is a complex phenomenon that can have many different meanings. Attention is focused in turn on the following three questions:

- i. What are the different meanings of home within the participants' everyday understanding?
- ii. Are there any meanings which are particularly associated with the elderly?
- iii. Are there any underlying themes or broad dimensions within people's conceptions of home?

## HOME: A PLACE OF MANY MEANINGS.

A departure point for the study of home experience in later life was to ask participants directly the question:

"What makes your house into a home?"

The open-ended nature of the question allowed people to express their own views as widely as possible. The emphasis was also on the personal meanings rather than the physical structure of the house alone. The opportunity was taken to ask participants to expand on, and to clarify, the things they said. Issues were probed with questions such as "what is the difference between a house and a home"?

Initially, the open-ended answers were reduced to a set of 36 meaning categories. Many of these were redundant in terms of meaning and could be incorporated within others, while still maintaining their semantic integrity. Eventually, 25 categories were defined which constituted meaningful conceptualisations of home. The inter-rater reliability procedure produced an 82 per cent agreement, and disagreements were negotiated to produce a final set of 25 categories (Table 4.1).

The meaning categories are similar to those generated in other studies of the meaning of home (Sixsmith, 1986; Hayward, 1977). Much of the literature has focused on a single aspect of home experience. However, the research reported here shows that "home" is characteristically complex and can be described in terms



Table 4.1 Categories of home meaning.

- a. It's what you make it
- b. Familiarity
- c. Good neighbours
- d. Like to return
- e. Memories
- f. Security
- g. Comfort
- h. Family
- i. Privacy
- j. Do what you want
- k. Arrange the place how you like
- l. Lived-in
- m. Friendly people around
- n. Happiness
- o. Convenient locality
- p. The place for the things I like to do
- q. Ownership and possession.
- r. Proximity to family
- s. Physical aspects of home.
- t. Belonging.
- u. Pleasant atmosphere
- v. Community feeling
- w. Place to bring friends back
- x. Personal objects
- y. Self.

of a range of independent and inter-dependent meanings. This is the case both at a general level and with individuals; most people mentioned two or three things when they talked about their homes. At this point it is useful to briefly examine each meaning category. A fuller account of the meaning categories can be found in Appendix 3.

a. It's What You Make It.

A person's home does not come ready-made. It is something that is built up by living in a place. This category emphasises the active role of the person in establishing the relationship with the home environment. The emphasis is very much on what the person does to make a place home. Many other aspects of home experience are based on this transaction, such as making a place comfortable or bringing-up a family. This is "dwelling" in the phenomenological sense, where "to dwell" means to "build" one's home.

b. Familiarity.

Familiarity is a rather nebulous and all-embracing concept and participants used the word for feelings that are often vague and difficult to express. The idea of

familiarity can involve a number of possible relationships between person and place. Firstly, familiarity is built up over time. Secondly, this interaction establishes knowledge of the place and people. Finally, familiarity affords a feeling of protection, and to move to an unfamiliar place would make one feel vulnerable.

c. Good Neighbours.

Having neighbours and being neighbourly is a social thing; neighbours can also be friends. But neighbourliness can go beyond friendship. It can be a matter of interdependence between individuals in a locality. Another aspect may be the general atmosphere engendered by the friendly relations in a locality (see "community", cat v).

d. Like to return.

Home is a place from which you must go and inevitably return. It provides a material and centre for a person's world (Gelwicks, 1970). The significance of "returning to" also involves "returning from" somewhere. The preference for return always involves this antithesis. Many of the participants talked about



returning home almost with a sense of relief or gratitude. In this way home can be seen as a haven, or a fixed point in a demanding world:

e. Memories.

For some elderly participants, memories, both good and bad, were important components of their home experience. Attachment to the home is often founded upon its associations with the past. As already noted, home is something that is built up over time. Although the present and future are significant components, many personally significant meanings point back to past events. In particular, valued memories focus upon family life, and these are often especially significant to widowed people.

f. Security.

The concept of "security" has a number of related sub-meanings. Firstly, the home affords security in terms of protection. There are also clear parallels between security and the concept of privacy (see category i). Both are a matter of regulating boundaries and access to the personal domain. The house confers control and thereby affords security and privacy. A

third aspect of security is associated with the idea of "permanence" (cat. g). Permanence would seem to be a logical and necessary component of security. Without the conviction or knowledge that the personal domain is safe and will remain safe, then that place cannot be truly a "home".

g. Comfort.

For a place to be a home. then it must fulfil the dweller's basic needs in terms of physical comfort. Comfort is not something that exists independently of the dweller. It is a transactional quality of home, emerging from a person's experience and future goals and needs. The concept goes beyond physical amenity and can be a matter of being sustained and protected both physically and spiritually.

h. Family.

The large number of people who mentioned "family" indicates that this category is the major component of home experience. One could assume that people who have no family living with them experience home in a different way to those who have family with them. Certainly, for many people, a house without a family can

be an empty and lonely place. Nevertheless, people living on their own still experience "home" in some way, with memories of past family life playing a crucial role.

i. Privacy.

The control over personal space afforded by the house is central to issues such as security and privacy. The fact that a person can legitimately exclude others by shutting the door is the main instrumental function of the house. Phenomenologically, privacy is the means by which the dweller attains goals such as solitude, intimacy, and "being quiet".

j. Do What You Want.

Again this category seems closely related to other aspects of home experience, such as "privacy" (cat. i) and "the place for the things I like to do" (cat. p). Home is a place where one can be oneself and do those things that require an intimate space. The significance of the home is that it is the domain of the self (cat. y), the place that is, more than any other place, controlled by the individual.



k. Arrange The Place How You LIke.

Several people mentioned that being able to arrange or manipulate the physical fabric of the house was important to them. This category points to the "home as symbol of self" that has been a major theme in home research. Through personalization of the basic physical environment, the dweller can give their own meaning to the place in which they live, reflecting the identity of the individual.

l. Lived-in.

This category refers to the obvious point that a home is not simply a building, but a place where someone lives. Again, this category can be seen to be related to others: "do what you want (cat. j), or "arrange place how I like" (cat. k). The emphasis of "lived-in" is on relaxation in the comfort and intimacy of the home. It is a place where you can be yourself, without reference to others. Usually, people say they prefer a place that is "not too tidy".

m. Friendly People Around.

"Home" is not necessarily equivalent to the house itself. A person's conception of home may extend to the locality, region or country. At the level of the locality, a number of participants emphasised the friendliness of the people living around. This category is related to "good neighbours" (cat. c). Perhaps the difference between the two is that "having friendly people around" does not imply the mutual assistance that is involved in participants' understanding of neighbourliness.

n. Happiness.

Although one cannot assume that the home environment is always a happy one, this does seem an important part of many people's conception of home. There seems to be two aspects to this. Firstly, happiness can be part of the "atmosphere" (cat. u) of a place. Secondly, happiness is associated with family life in the home. Many widowed people talked about their homes as happy places in the present tense. For them, the happiness of family life lives on through their memories (cat. e).

o. Convenient Locality.

When asked what home meant to them, a few people

mentioned that the area in which they lived was convenient in terms of facilities and services. One can suggest that an area must offer certain minimum levels of services that are appropriate to the perceived needs of the people living there. Although participants have usually defined "home" by personal and symbolic meanings, the more instrumental issue of local services should not be ignored.

p. The Place For The Things I Like To Do.

Several people felt that their homes were important because of the activities they carried on there. People were often fond of gardening or do-it-yourself, while one man was on an Open University course saw his home as a place for studying. With the loss of employment on retirement, many of the participants replaced work related activities with hobbies and informal work.

q. Ownership and Possession.

Owning one's own house was important for some people. In the first instance ownership confers basic rights over the property. Ownership affords permanence, security and control, but may also be the basis of more personally significant meanings. For example, the



commitment to buying the house can be part of the "building" (cat. a) that is fundamental to dwelling in a phenomenological sense. Although the fact of ownership is important to owner-occupiers, this does not seem to be an essential quality of home experience, as council-renters were equally committed to their homes. It may be more fruitful to talk in terms of "possession" rather than ownership per se.

r. Proximity to Family.

Some older people mentioned that living near to where members of their family lived was important to them. As well as being a matter of emotional involvement, one's family can be important in terms of instrumental support.

s. Physical Aspects of the Home.

This is a rather "catch-all" category that encompasses the physical attributes of the home that have not been included under "comfort" (cat. g) and "convenient locality" (cat. o). The emphasis is not so much on the physical fabric of the house per se, but on the use to which it is put. For example, many participants said that having a garden was important to them. The

physical fabric of the house provides the material basis for the more symbolic qualities of home experience. The house is something that you work with, symbolically building the home around you.

t. Belonging.

A few people said that they "belong" in the place they lived. This is a rather vague notion, and perhaps implies some of the other categories of home meaning, such as "familiarity" (cat. b). The term was not widely used by participants, suggesting that this was not a conscious concern. Rather, it may be an unreflective relationship between person and place.

u. Pleasant Atmosphere.

As with "belonging" (cat. t), this is a nebulous concept, used to articulate something that cannot really be expressed. Participants felt that their homes possessed some intrinsic quality such as "happiness" (cat. n). This atmosphere is not so much something in the dweller, but more an external quality of the place itself. The person has moved from defining home in terms of the self, to defining it in terms of the "atmosphere" of the place. Eventually, it is as if we

ourselves do not contribute to the emotional qualities of the home. Home experience is thus very much an externalised and relict experience that is built up over time.

v. Community Feeling.

Although this was one of the least significant meanings to emerge from the content analysis, it was felt necessary to differentiate it from the related concepts of "good neighbours" (cat. c) and "friendliness of people" (cat. m). The difference lies in the way people use the word "community". Most people were content to use expressions such as neighbourliness. Those people who used "community" were more self-consciously concerned with fostering an ideal of how people should behave in a locality.

w. Bring Friends Back.

For some people, their homes were central to all aspects of their life, including their social life. Although this category did not figure widely in people's accounts, this issue deserves comment. Rosenberg (1979) suggests that friends are an important component in the stability of the self-concept. A person's house may be



symbolic in this respect. Who is invited in reflects and communicates the dweller's wishes in terms of social interaction.

x. Personal Objects.

The significance of personal objects can be seen in relation to other categories: "arrange place how I like" (cat. k); "it's what you make it" (cat. a); self (cat. y). The basic theme is again that of personalization and appropriation of the physical place. For some people using this category, it is the objects themselves that are associated with home, rather than the house in itself. In this way the home can be seen to be transportable, rather than being grounded in a particular place. These objects represent important links to the past and reinforce identity and continuity.

y. Self.

The phenomenological concept of "dwelling" (see cat. a), suggests that home and self reflect each other. Bachelard (1969) argues that just as house and non-house are domains of physical space, self and non-self present a parallel division of psychic space. Similarly, Norberg-Schultz (1972) argues that geographical and

psychical space are congruent with the home as the locus of the self. Thus, home involves a transaction between person and place, where home and self constitute each other.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MEANINGS OF HOME.

The content analysis indicates that "home" is a complex phenomenon that can mean many different things to different people. During the interviews and the subsequent analysis, two issues became central to the understanding of people's experience of home. Firstly, some of the meanings were mentioned much more frequently than others, and secondly, some meanings were particularly associated with the elderly. This section examines these issues in greater detail.

The transactional perspective suggests that "home" is not static, but is something that unfolds over time. For example, familiarity with a place builds up over the years, and provides a basis for the continuity of home experience. One would also expect future considerations to be significant in defining home experience in terms of the person's goals and objectives for the future and their reactions to changes in present circumstances. This is important for understanding the relationship

between ageing and the home environment. One must look not only at the features of home experience in general, but also at those that may be particular to later life. That is those aspects of home experience that are contingent upon the common characteristics of later life, such as changes in physical capability and other significant life events.

To see how home experience may change over the lifespan, a longitudinal approach would have been appropriate. Unfortunately, this was not feasible within the constraints of the project and an alternative approach involved the examination of similarities and differences in home experience between elderly participants and other social groups. The differences between the elderly group and the comparison groups should give clues as to which meanings of home are of particular relevance to the elderly.

As the data has been reduced to discrete categories, it is possible to approach the analysis quantitatively. Table 4.2 shows the overall frequency of mention of the 25 categories, ranked in order of significance. In general, the frequency of response for each category is low. However, in the context of entirely open-ended research, just because someone does not mention a particular category does not mean that it is not a part (albeit unarticulated) of their home



Table 4.2 Frequency of mention of categories of home.  
(percentages)

Category	All	over 65	unemployd	employd
Family	56	40	82	82
Comfort	20	22	36	24
It's what you make it	19	18	18	24-
Happiness	17	18	23	6
Like to return	16	20	14	6
Arrange place how I like	16	15	9	29
Possessions	17	5	18	53
Familiarity	15	16	9	18
Privacy	15	18	14	6
Do what you want	16	15	18	18-
Ownership	13	16	9	6
Atmosphere	13	7	23	18
Security	13	15	18	0
Lived-in	12	5	18	24
Physical	12	11	5	24
Friendly people around	11	16	5	0
Memories	9	15	0	0
Good neighbours	7	15	0	0-
Self	7	2	14	18
Things to do	5	9	0	0
Convenient locality	5	7	0	6
Belonging	4	4	0	12
Bring friends back	4	2	5	12
Proximity to family	2	4	0	0
Community	1	0	9	0
	n=88	n=49	n=17	n=22

experience. Hence, inferences have to be made on the basis of relatively low frequencies.

Table 4.2 shows that "family" is of greatest overall importance (56%), with over twice as many participants mentioning this category, compared with the next most important meaning. Apart from "family", there are no other obviously important categories, and the frequency of usage decreases uniformly from "comfort" (20%) to "community" (2%). These aggregate figures are of little interest in themselves. A more illuminating aspect of Table 4.2 is the frequency of mention for the different social groups (elderly, younger unemployed, younger employed). This indicates that while there are meanings which are common to all groups, there are differences between the three groups.

Table 4.3 classifies the 25 home meanings according to whether they are common to all groups or whether they are specific to particular groups. It is clear from the Table 4.2 that few meanings are exclusively associated with a specific group. However, it is equally clear that some meanings are of only marginal importance to some groups. In Table 4.3, individual meanings are counted as being significant for a particular group if the frequency is greater than the mean of 14%. On this basis, three groups of meanings are identified: common meanings; meanings associated with the elderly; meanings

Table 4.3 Common and group meanings of home.

Common	It's what you make it Comfort Family Do what you want
Elderly	Good neighbours Memories Friendly people around Ownership
Elderly/ unemployed	Happiness Like to return Privacy Security
Elderly/ employed	Familiarity Arrange place how I like
Non-elderly	Lived-in Atmosphere Possessions Physical aspects Self



that are not associated with the elderly. These are described in turn.

#### Common Meanings of Home.

These are categories that are significant for all three groups and can be seen as perhaps the most fundamental of the various meanings of home. Only four categories emerged as common to all three groups: "it's what you make it"; "comfort"; "family"; and "do what you want". These should not be seen as "core" meanings, that is meanings that are significant for everybody, as this would imply a universality that is not supported by the data. Simply, these are meanings that are characteristic throughout society.

Even within these common meanings of home there are variations between the groups. For example, "family" is the most important category in all three groups. However, while 82 per cent of both the younger employed and unemployed mentioned "family", the figure for the elderly was only 40 per cent. This lower figure may be because half of the elderly sample lived alone, whereas most of the younger participants lived in a family context. This indicates that people's conceptions of home are related to their particular social circumstances, as well as personal circumstances and

values. In view of this, a focus on inter-group differences is likely to be the source of insight into the relationship between home and ageing.

#### Meanings associated with the elderly.

Table 4.3 indicates that the elderly group are particularly associated with a number of categories, which can be seen to fall into two main groups. A first group of meanings, "return", "privacy" and "security", indicate an association between the elderly and the unemployed. These meanings reflect an introspective orientation, and a "looking inwards" in environmental terms. "Return" is one of the most important meanings associated with the elderly group. Several of the older participants said that doing things outside the home was often a trying experience. Although, the older participants generally liked to get out and about, returning home was often something that is welcomed as a relief. Kaplan's (1983) notion of "restorative environments" may be applicable here. These are environments where people recover from the pressures and constraints of everyday activities. The significance of the home in affording "privacy" and "security" has been discussed in earlier sections. Privacy itself provides the basis for "escaping" from the outside world, to relax and rest and recuperate, an affordance which seems

to be of particular significance to the elderly and the unemployed (cf. Sixsmith, 1988).

The privacy of one's home also affords revery and remembering. Home as a place for "memories" is a category that is exclusively associated with the elderly participants. Although none of the elderly seemed obsessively concerned with the past, for many of them, especially the widowed, the past was of prime significance. Memories are often closely associated with the house in which past events occurred. These associations may lead a person to feel that their memories and the physical environment of the home are inextricably linked. In these cases, to leave that place would be to abandon those memories. This is not the case with all the elderly participants, but the significance of "memories" as part of home experience in later life should not be underestimated.

"Memories" is an important component of the happiness dimension of home experience. Surprisingly, "happiness" does not figure as a significant category for the younger, employed group. This does not mean that being happy in their homes is not important for these people, but perhaps it is a more conscious concern for the elderly and the unemployed. For many older people, especially the widowed, happiness in the home is associated with the past. The home is often a place of



fond memories of happy times. These associations remain significant, even though their source is no longer present. In this context, happiness is no longer something that is taken for granted and memories of happy times become valued and cultivated. "Happiness" is also significant for the unemployed group. Again, happiness may be something that is no longer something that is taken for granted. For example, two of the unemployed participants actually saw their homes as unhappy places. They could no longer afford to buy things for their children, or to maintain their houses to their personal standards. This was a source of distress, contrasted with the happiness of previous times.

The role of the home as a psychological "shell" implies an orientation that is away from the outside world, towards the protective interior of the home. This focus upon the home may also be reinforced by the social situations in which older people often find themselves. Although the category "the place for things I like to do" is not particularly important, it deserves some comment. As Canter (1984) points out, social functions usually involve some sort of psycho-spatial demarcation. Thus, the changing social characteristics associated with old age may involve some environmental reorientation. This is an environmental parallel of the loss of social roles in old age that is associated with

disengagement theory. Although Rowles (1978) has to some extent debunked the stereotyped view of older people as "prisoners of space:", it remains that people tend to spend more time in their homes during their later years. This does not imply that spatial "disengagement" leaves some sort of environmental vacuum in these people's lives. The opposite case is illustrated by those participants who saw their home as "the place for things I like to do". All pursued new or expanded activities during retirement, the difference being that they are centred on the home. For example, one man started an Open University course, while for the man who is a railway enthusiast, retirement was welcomed, as it meant that he could spend most of his time at home with his collection.

This aspect of home is not universal amongst the elderly participants. For some, being at home is associated with boredom and loneliness. This negative aspect of the person-home relationship is also common amongst the unemployed group, who like the elderly, spend a lot of their time at home. Some unemployed people mentioned that they were unable to afford to do many of the things around the house that they had previously enjoyed, such as do-it-yourself. Notions of "enforced" and "mutual" disengagement may be useful in explaining this situation. One can argue that for many people, meaningful roles have been lost that will never

be replaced. On the other hand, many people find that change in later life is not just a matter of loss, but also of opportunities for doing things, and for this group, the home may become increasingly significant.

A second set of meanings are uniquely associated with the elderly are instrumental in nature. Having "good neighbours" is a valued source of support by some of the more frail participants. The point here is that some of the elderly participants stressed aspects of home that afford an independent life, at a time when physical capacities and the ability to look after themselves may be declining. For these people, home was an important symbol of independence, and the sources of informal support within the locality were essential to remaining at home. From this perspective, two meaning categories which are not included in Table 4.3, because they are of only marginal importance, are of interest. These are "convenient locality" (5%) and "proximity to family" (4%), both of which are exclusive to the elderly group. "Convenient locality" is an important issue for those elderly people who find that they cannot carry heavy shopping bags or make longer distance trips, while living close to one's children may also be a source of support.

These instrumental values also seem to be associated more with characteristics of the locale



rather than the house itself. This can be seen as involving a social as well as an instrumental concern. In this social sense, "good neighbours" and "friendly people around" are equivalent. Living close to one's family also has an obviously social, as well as instrumental, dimension.

Meanings not associated with the elderly.

An understanding of the relationship between home and ageing can also be facilitated by looking at those meanings which were not important for the elderly group. The following were significant for one or both of the other groups, but not for the elderly: lived-in; atmosphere; possessions; physical; self.

The two categories of "self" and "possessions" are of particular interest, given the emphasis on these issues within the literature on home. Both these categories are notably missing from the accounts of elderly participants, and stand in contrast with the younger employed group, where 53 percent mentioned "possessions" and 18 per cent mentioned "self". It is difficult to interpret this outcome at this stage. However, one could suggest that the expressive dimension of home experience may be of lesser importance to the elderly than for younger groups.

### Discussion.

The aim behind this section was to identify those aspects of home which are of particular importance to the elderly. It is difficult to say with certainty whether a meaning is or is not significant for any group. For example, one cannot say that "happiness" is more important for the elderly than for the younger, employed group. What is indicated, however, is a conscious value placed on certain aspects of home experience, such as happiness, which may be predicated by a feeling of loss or change in circumstances in later life. For younger people, happiness may be something that is taken for granted. Several older people said that, when they were young, their home was just a place for coming and going and living in. It is often not until later that a person realises the happiness of family life and how much this is a part of their home experience. The analysis has pointed to a number of conscious concerns that underlie the particular meanings associated with the elderly.

Firstly, older people appear to be more concerned with instrumental aspects of home than the younger participants. This may be related to a desire to remain at home and maintain an independent life. If an

increasingly frail older person is to stay at home, then the environment in which they live must afford support. Access to local amenities can be important, while the informal support offered by neighbours can be invaluable.

A second issue is that older people, through personal choice and by force of circumstances, seem to be more oriented towards their homes than are younger people. For instance, the emphasis on home as a "refuge" is important for the elderly. The home may also become increasingly important as older people spend more time there as previous social roles are superseded.

A third theme is that older people may have a deeper personal concern for their homes. The issue of "memories" is of particular significance, involving past associations within the present experience of home. This aspect is notably absent from the accounts of younger participants.

#### DIMENSIONS OF HOME EXPERIENCE.

If one asks a person what home means to them, they usually mention a number of qualities. However, many of these qualities seem to be interrelated in some way.



The emphasis on instrumental issues by the elderly, for example, suggests that the specific articulated meanings are the outcome of deeper structural concerns. In this section attention is devoted to uncovering these deeper themes within people's experience of home. This problem is approached by examining the way specific meanings are used together within participants' accounts of their home experience.

#### Smallest space analysis of meanings of home.

The analysis of these interrelationships is based on the construction of a triangular matrix of associations between the 25 meanings of home within people's accounts. Each off-diagonal cell represents a possible association between two meanings categories, involving  $300 \left[ \frac{(n*n)-n}{2} \right]$  possible associations. If a person mentioned more than one meaning category in their definition of home experience, then the associations are entered in the matrix. To illustrate:

"More often it's the atmosphere. People are friendly and you can walk out and see lots of people you can talk to. I feel comfortable and happy inside the house. I am inside the house an awful lot you see. If I have been out, I am glad to get back home again. It's that kind of

atmosphere" (67).

This statement can be reduced to five meanings: atmosphere (u); friendly people around (m); comfort (g); happiness (n); return (d). Each pair of these meanings is taken as an association, producing a total of ten associations (um, ug, un, ud, mg, mn, md, gn, gd, nd). All associations for all participants were entered into the matrix (Table 4.4).

The matrix is characterised by an uneven spread, implying that some cells are more significant than others, and that some associations are more important than others. Although the matrix is itself useful for showing which individual cells might be of significance, it is difficult to discern any deeper structure, without the aid of some analytical technique. Smallest space analysis (SSA) (Lingoes, 1973) was chosen as an appropriate method in the present context. SSA is one of a range of multidimensional scaling (MDS) procedures (Coxon, 1982; Davies and Coxon, 1982). The basic principle of MDS is that data items are arranged in m-dimensional space so that the relationships between items are preserved and presented as graphical representations. Data items are located according to how closely associated they are, and using a simple Euclidean distance model, turns the association matrix into a set of Euclidean distances. Thus, on an SSA

[illegible]



Table 4.5 Associations between meanings of home:  
SSA input matrix  
(actual - expected frequencies)

[illegible]

a. You make it	g. Comfort	l. Lived-in
b. Familiarity	h. Family	n. Happiness
d. Return	i. Privacy	q. Ownership
e. Memories	j. Do what	x. Objects
f. Security	k. Arrange place	y. Self

plot, items which are most closely associated will be located close together, while those which are not linked will be located further away. The SSA procedure attempts to produce a configuration of points, in m-dimensional space, that minimises differences between the actual and graphical relationships between items. Representations are usually restricted to a maximum of 3 dimensions, as it is difficult to interpret the outcomes at a higher dimensionality.

As attention is focused on the conceptual linkages between different meaning categories, it is important that chance associations are eliminated from the analysis. Thus, the matrix in its original state is not appropriate, as the data may include associations which are not conceptually linked. For example, one could expect a high association score for "comfort" and "family" simply because they are mentioned more than any of the other categories. To overcome this problem, it is necessary to isolate those associations that have a value greater than one would expect by chance. On this basis a new association matrix was constructed by subtracting expected cell values from the actual values in the original matrix. Prior to input into the SSA program, all cells of marginal significance within the matrix were excluded (all cells with values of  $<3$  in the original matrix, and all cells with values of  $<1.5$  in the second matrix). This was done in order to further

reduce "noise" within the data and to focus on the most significant associations. This eliminated a number of the meaning categories to produce a final input matrix (Table 4.5). The SSA output is in terms of a series of plots.

#### Interpretation of results.

The interpretation and partitioning of the SSA space is not a precise exercise. Indeed, it is likely that the SSA plots could be partitioned in a number of ways, that would be considerably different from the system that is outlined here. The role SSA should be seen as a heuristic; an aid to understanding complex systems of relationships between meanings, rather than as a statistical procedure, and in this sense it is congruent with the principles of empirical phenomenology (Sixsmith and Sixsmith, 1987). Within this perspective, SSA does not present cut and dried "results". Rather, the foundation of the interpretation needs to be laid prior to the analysis itself. For example, meaning categories had already been evaluated in terms of their relative importance, and the more significant ones would be likely to play a more important part in the overall structure of home meaning. Also the earlier examination of the individual meanings, together with the theoretical evaluation of the home concept in Chapter 2,



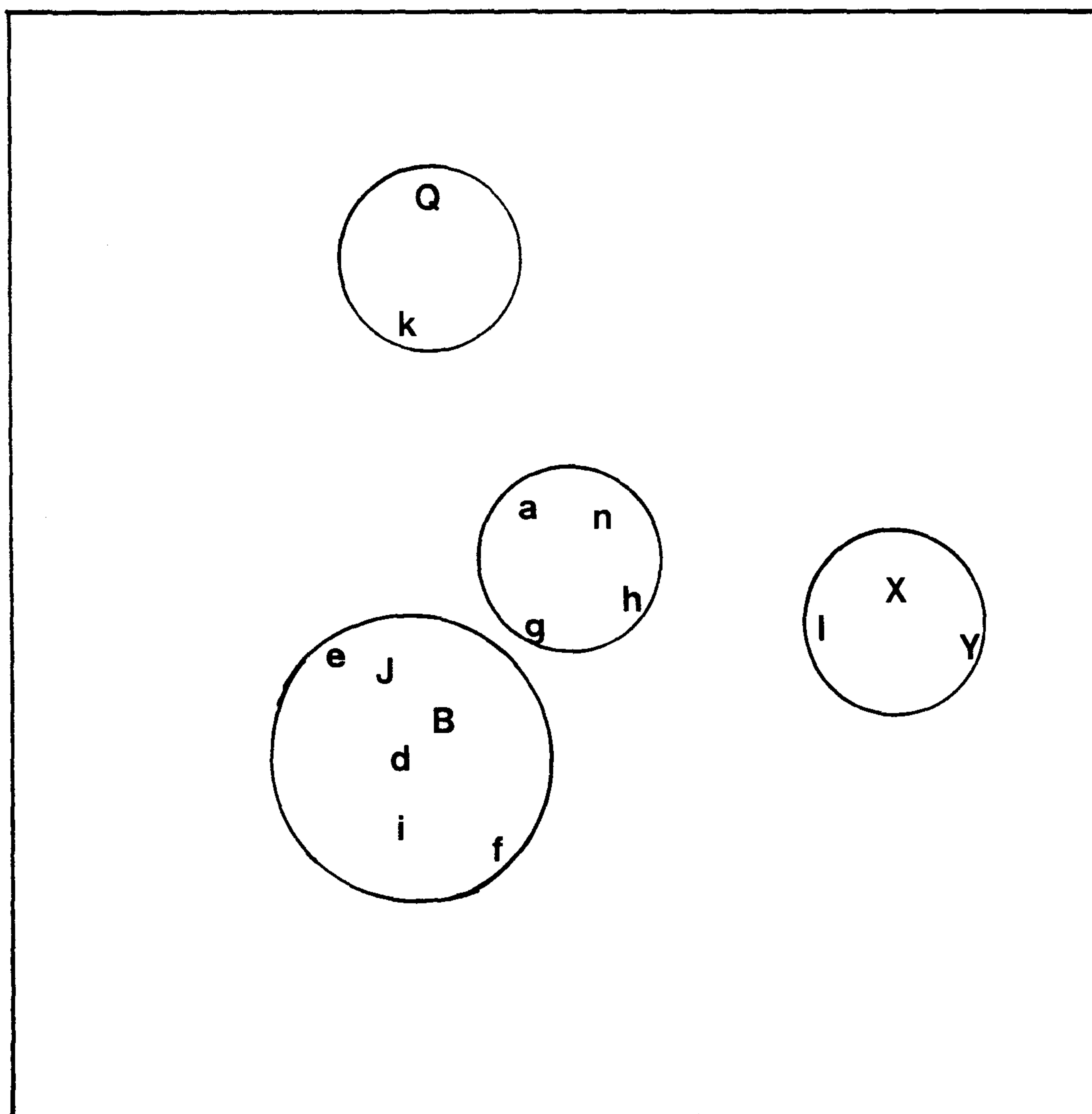
provide an essential basis for understanding the underlying dimensions of home experience.

The structure of an SSA plot is likely to show groupings, or discrete regions, indicating interrelationships between data items. All the items within each group need not be directly associated, but may be indirectly related through other items within the group. In many cases, a particular item can be a dominant factor within a group.

Figure 4.1 is a plot from the 3-dimensional SSA solution (vector 2 by vector 1). This shows four distinct groupings within the SSA space. A useful exercise is to involve a hierarchical representation of the relationships in the SSA space. Figure 4.2 shows linkages between items according to their relative significance within the matrix. Three levels of association are used (cell values  $x > 3$ ,  $x > 2$ ,  $x > 1.5$ ). At the highest level, four distinct groups emerge: privacy/security, objects/self, family/comfort, arrange place/ownership. These groups are clearly associated with the groups already defined by the initial partitioning of the SSA plot in Figure 4.1. This strongly suggests that these form the major "themes" of people's conceptions of home.

"Family" is the single most significant aspect of

Figure 4.1 SSA Plot- four groupings of home meanings



a. You make it  
b. Familiarity  
d. Return  
e. Memories  
f. Security

g. Comfort  
h. Family  
i. Privacy  
j. Do what  
k. Arrange place

l. Lived-in  
n. Happiness  
q. Ownership  
x. Objects  
y. Self





people's conceptions of home. The family focus implies happiness and comfort. It is interesting that the family/comfort connection is significant. On the face of it, this link would seem to be incidental. However, it has already been suggested that "comfort" can be a subjective evaluation of a place. Hence, a pleasant atmosphere and a happy family life may contribute to a person's feeling of comfort in a place.

Happiness is an important aspect of the family home. The analysis indicates that this connection is very strong and one could suggest that happiness within the home is more or less contingent upon family life. Without the family as a focus, happiness cannot be incorporated in people's conception of home except in a vicarious or imaginary way. For some widowed people, happiness is no longer an issue in their present experience of home. For them, the family/happiness aspect of home is experienced through memories.

The category "It's what you make it" is also associated with "family", and refers to the creation of family life within the home. For many of the respondents, home was "something that you make together", and many widowed people were especially aware of this issue after reflecting on the loss of their partner.

Obviously, the family orientation involves a home that is shared by a number of people, which is at odds with the rather individualistic emphasis in the discussion of home so far. In many respects, this is not a problem. In western culture, the nuclear family can be seen as the basic social unit, and family members operate as a member of that unit. The home itself reflects this basic social organisation. However, the role of the family is more than just that of a social unit. When people talked about their homes, it was often in terms of "we". This was the case with many widowed people, who still conceived of their homes as a shared, family experience. The "we" of the family implies a collective identity, and although the family comprises individuals, home meanings are usually appropriated in the context of a shared, family lifestyle.

A second theme of home experience is that of objects/self. The SSA indicates that the relationship between personal objects and the idea of the "self" is important. This has already been discussed to a large extent. Objects are significant, not in themselves, but in terms of the symbolic value for their owner. Objects are "cared-for" because they are a personal statement of what we are and how we see ourselves. In this way objects reflect the self, both in terms of expressing who we are and reinforcing our self-conception.

A third focus is that of arrange the place how I like/ownership. This implies the home as the domain of the person, a place over which they have control. Ownership or possession implies a legitimate right of control over the home space and perhaps the concern of "arrange place" is an assertion of personal authority.

Finally, privacy/security appears as a fourth focus of home experience. This is a complex issue that is again related to the idea of the home as the domain of the individual. In the earlier discussion in Chapter 2, privacy was seen to involve a number of components: control over access to the house; a sense of self; a place of psychological shelter; security. These aspects are reflected in the meanings associated with privacy. The security aspect is significant, while "memories" and "familiarity" imply a continuity that is an important aspect of home experience for some people. The idea of "return" suggests that privacy afforded by the home is experienced as a "haven" or "shelter" in a physically and psychologically demanding world. "Privacy" in this sense is related to Bachelard's (1969) notion of the home as a "shell" that protects the dweller, affording tranquility and revery.

One of the main themes of the study so far is that the meaning and experience of home is not something that



is given in the environment. In fact, the physical characteristics of the home are largely incidental to the experience of home. This is shown by participants' emphasis on meanings such as "privacy", which are physically grounded only by the control affordance of the house. Even issues such as "comfort" and "personal objects" are significant mainly in a psychological and symbolic way. The point is that "home" is defined in terms of meanings that are appropriated by the person within a specific context. This is dwelling in a phenomenological sense.

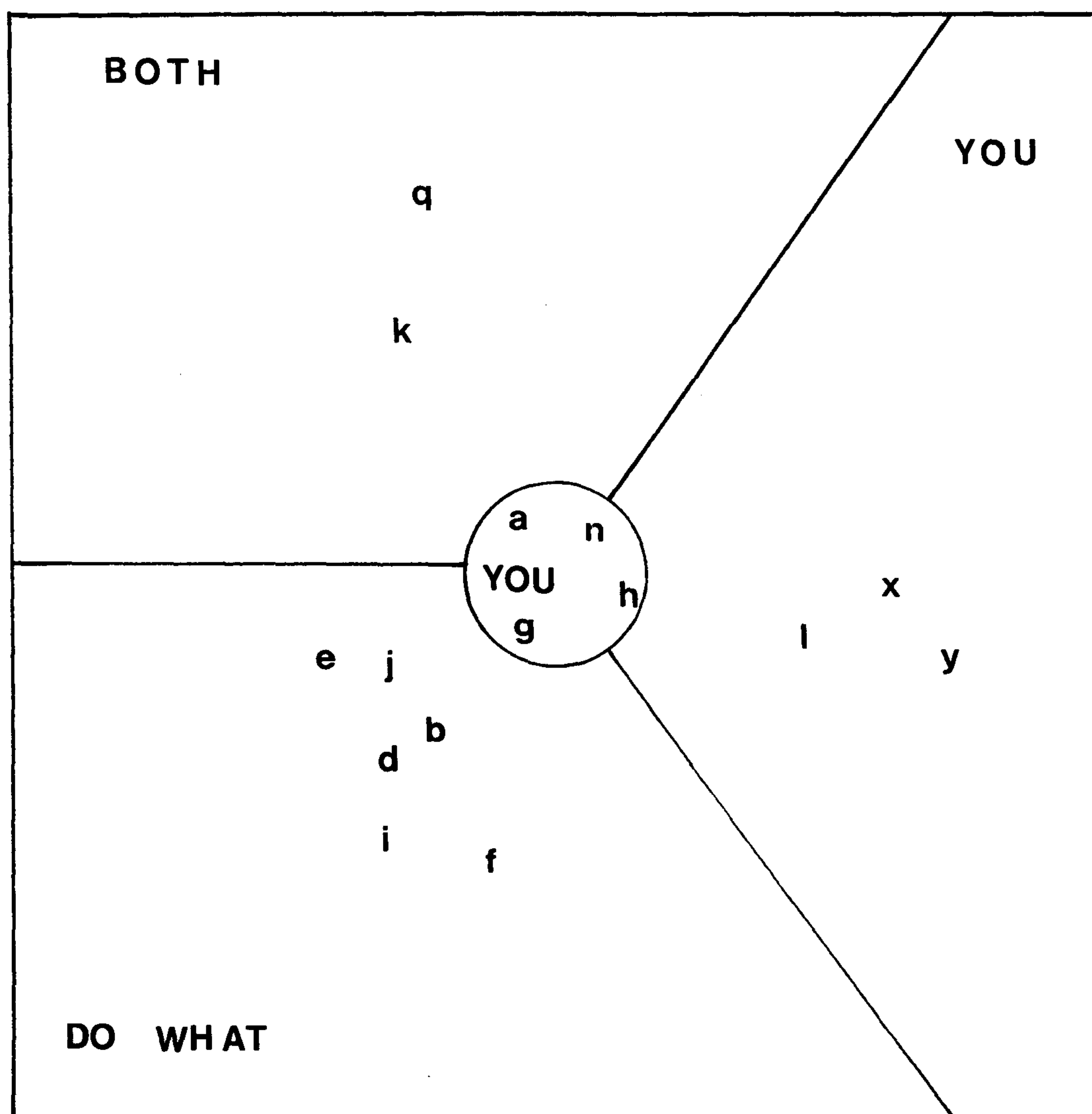
In this respect, it is interesting to note the the operation of the four meanings "family", "it's what you make it", "self" and "do what" within the SSA space, as shown by the linkages in Figure 4.2. These categories play an important part in linking the four groups of meanings and all point to the role of the dweller in establishing home, in terms of either creating or using the home. For example, "it's what you make it" can be seen to be directed towards creating or "building", while "do what you want" is directed towards using the home. Another interpretation is that "it's what you make it" is directed towards the dweller themselves, and is expressive of the individual "self". Alternatively, "do what you want" is directed towards the home, and what the place affords the individual; that is expressive of the place and impressive to the person.

This interpretation is consistent with the idea of appropriation, where meanings develop dialectically, by the person acting on, and being acted on by, the home environment.

The SSA (Figure 4.3) indicates that some aspects of home experience relate particularly to "do what you want", while others relate to "it's what you make it". The two groups of meanings, family/comfort and self/personal objects, are associated with "it's what you make it". The idea of the home being expressive of the individual is very clear in the case of "personal objects". Objects play an essential part in personalizing the house, by representing personal values of the dweller. As already noted, the relation between "family" and "it's what you make it" refers to the creation of family life within the home.

The focus of privacy/security, is directed towards "do what you want". This is an important relationship. "Do what you want" for most participants can be roughly translated as "relaxing and being oneself", without the influence of others. Usually, this means nothing more than returning home, watching television, or doing jobs around the house. These may be mundane activities, but they are personally significant, within the intimate space of the house. As Bachelard (1969) suggests, the home, more than any other place, allows one to be

Figure 4.3 SSA Plot- role of "it's what you make it  
and "do what you want"



a. You make it  
b. Familiarity  
d. Return  
e. Memories  
f. Security

g. Comfort  
h. Family  
i. Privacy  
j. Do what  
k. Arrange place

l. Lived-in  
n. Happiness  
q. Ownership  
x. Objects  
y. Self



oneself, because it is a place of intimacy and privacy.

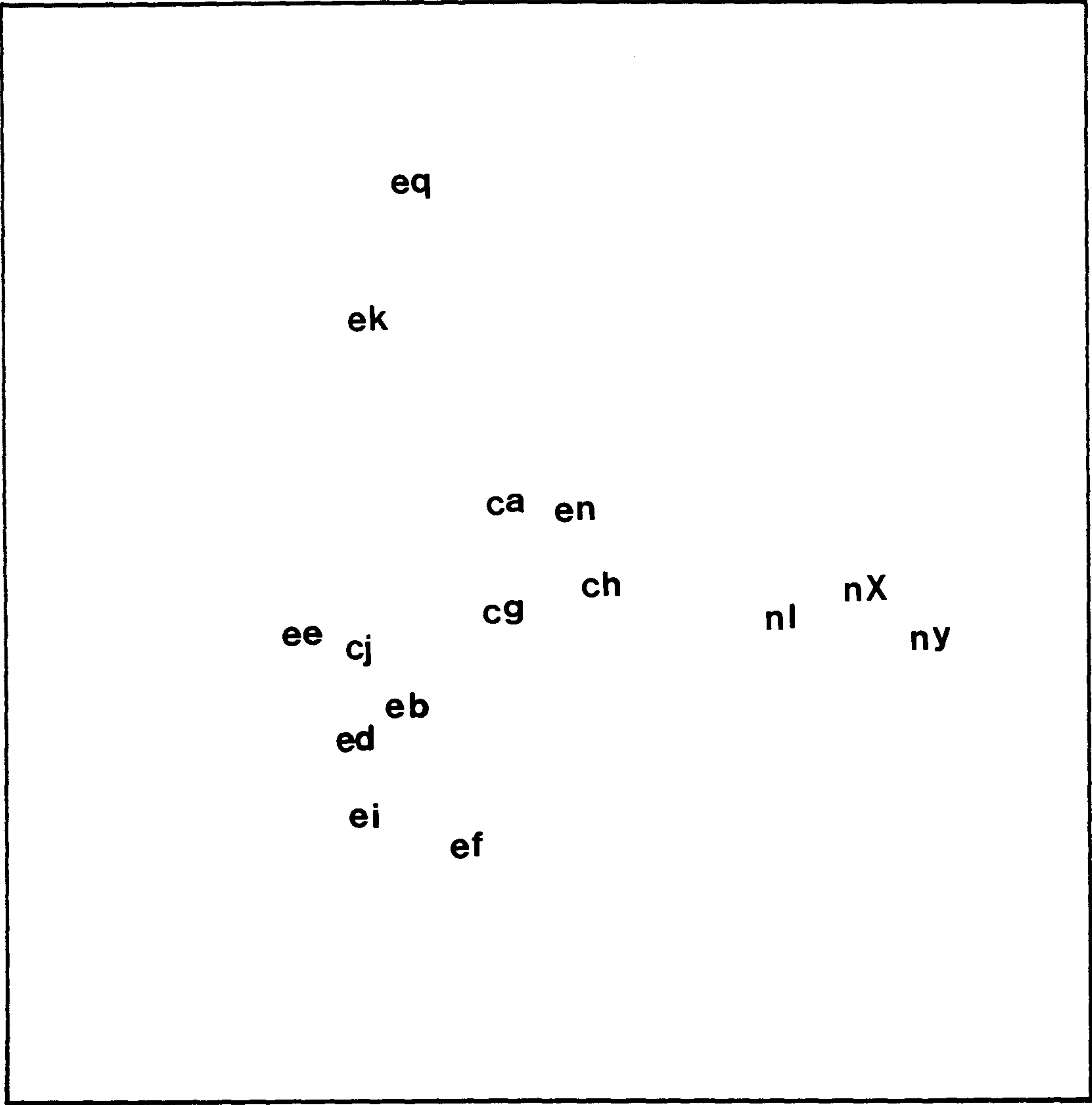
The group of arrange place/ownership differs from the other main dimensions of home in that it involves both "it's what you make it" and "do what you want". The emphasis is upon physically doing things to the house, through home improvements, decoration and furnishing. The parallel with personal objects is clear, and the use of objects to personalize the home is one aspect of physically arranging the home environment. Thus, "arrange place" is associated with the "it's what you make it" direction of home experience. Equally though, individuals arrange their homes to suit their needs, to protect themselves physically and psychologically, and to afford the things they like to do. "Arrange place" is thus also directed towards "do what you want".

In the earlier analysis of individual meanings of home, it was shown that some meanings are associated with particular groups of participants. It is also possible to partition the SSA space on this basis. Figure 4.4 is a further interpretation of the SSA plot, where the partitioning is made on the basis of whether meanings are associated with all groups, the elderly or the non-old.

The partitioning closely follows the pattern of

Figure 4.4 SSA Plot- meanings associated with the elderly

- c - common meanings
- e - meanings associated with the elderly
- n - meanings not associated with the elderly



- |                |                  |              |
|----------------|------------------|--------------|
| a. You make it | g. Comfort       | l. Lived-in  |
| b. Familiarity | h. Family        | n. Happiness |
| d. Return      | i. Privacy       | q. Ownership |
| e. Memories    | j. Do what       | x. Objects   |
| f. Security    | k. Arrange place | y. Self      |

four main groups that has already been described. The "objects/self" group is significant for the non-elderly participants, while the "family/comfort" group is within the central area of common meanings of home. The "privacy/security" group is associated with the elderly. The two partitionings are not entirely congruent. For example, "familiarity" and "do what you want" are common meanings of home within the region associated with "privacy/security". Also, the "arrange place how I like" is common, while "ownership" is particularly associated with the elderly. Nevertheless, the groups remain fairly distinct. In the present context, the distinction between old and non-old in relation to the "objects/self" and "privacy/security" groups is of particular interest.

#### CONCLUSION.

The aims behind this chapter were firstly to provide some basic insights into the meaning and experience of home, to identify those aspects which are of particular significance for the elderly, and to identify some of the broader themes which underlie people's everyday conceptions of home.

Home is characteristically a complex and



multivarious experience. At an individual level, people usually mentioned a number of meanings of home. There were also wide differences between people, as to what they considered to be home. Despite these differences, people's responses could be assigned to a limited number (25) of shared meanings of home.

Some of these meanings were more significant than others. "Family" was the single most important facet of home experience, while others, such as "community" were used only by a few people. Some aspects can be seen to be common throughout society, while others are associated with certain social situations. For example, older participants emphasised instrumental concerns,

The specific meanings used by people reflect more fundamental concerns. Four aspects of home experience were defined: family/comfort, objects/self, arrange place/ownership, and privacy/return. Although home experience is focused in this way, that experience is also a function of the transaction between person and place. This can be understood in terms of two underlying meanings: "it's what you make it" and "do what you want". The former emphasises the creative role of the dweller in defining the home, while the latter emphasises the use of the home.

The analysis presented in this chapter has pointed

to a number of issues that are pertinent to the investigation into the home-ageing relationship:

i. Issues such as privacy were associated with the older participants. The older participants tended to be concerned with the more introspective and passive qualities of home, such as privacy and refuge, while activities in general tend to become more home-centred. Thus in some respects, older people tend to become more focused on the home as opposed to other places.

ii. Older people tended to stress more instrumental aspects of home. For many of these people, old age was a time of declining physical ability and a concern was that the home and locality afforded an independent life.

iii. In certain ways, older people can become more attached to their homes. Home is no longer a general concept, but is related to a specific place. This "rootedness" is apparent in the emphasis placed on memories by some older people, and their desire to remain living at the scene of significant past events.

These three issues- home focus, independence and attachment- form the main empirical domains of this study, and each is addressed in turn in subsequent chapters. This involves a more detailed exploration that progresses from the very general perspective

presented in this chapter, to an understanding of ageing and home that goes some way to encompassing the richness and vagaries of individual experience.



## Chapter 5

HOME FOCUS: THE INCREASING SIGNIFICANCE OF HOME IN LATER  
LIFE.

## INTRODUCTION.

In this chapter, the issue of "home focus" is examined. This term refers to a tendency for the home to take on greater significance for a person as they grow older. This issue emerged as central to the understanding of older people's geographic experience as the research progressed, but is also embedded in both lay conceptions of ageing and academic gerontological research (cf. Gelwicks, 1970). As discussed in Chapter 3, the dominant image of geographic experience in old age is one of inexorable spatial constriction, based on increasing personal incapacity and progressive environmental constraint.

One could argue that this image exaggerates both the prevalence and severity of declining capacities and the issue of spatial constriction. However, during the fieldwork it quickly became apparent that most of the participants felt that their home environment had become more important to them as they had got older. This relationship is far from simple and, as Rowles (1978) argues, spatial restriction is not an inevitable part of growing old. Thus, the research had to look at the questions of why and how home focus becomes significant in later life.

The analysis was approached in a number of ways. Firstly, it was important to establish, in general terms, the significance of the home environment in later life. This was done by examining the role of the home within the wider geographic experience of comparative groups of elderly, younger unemployed and younger employed people. Subsequently, open-ended questions were asked in order to explore the common reasons that participants use to explain home focus in later life. Finally, a number of case studies were undertaken in an idiographic investigation of home focus. This was an attempt to look at, and take seriously, the individual, creative responses that older people make to their changing circumstances.

#### THE GEOGRAPHIC LIFESPACE OF OLDER PEOPLE.

The first issue to be examined is the relative significance of the home environment within people's whole environmental experience. To this end comparative groups of over-65's, younger unemployed and employed people were asked to list all the places that they use or might use. A number of questions were used to prompt as wide a range of possible: places visited in a normal week; places visited now and again; shopping; social visiting; recreation and entertainment; necessary



places. This is a fairly crude method and it was found that recall of the different places within a person's experience was not particularly accurate or specific. However, the emphasis is on comparisons between groups and methodological errors should remain constant, allowing relative evaluations to be made.

Table 5. 1 gives an indication of the geographical range of people within the different groups. The clear conclusion to be drawn is that the older participants used a much smaller range of places, compared with the younger groups. Moreover, the restricted range seems to hold true for all the elderly people interviewed; the maximum mentioned was 14 with a minimum of five places mentioned, with a standard deviation of 2. 08. Although the individual ranges varied widely within the younger groups, the minimum number mentioned was always above the mean for the elderly group.

A similar picture is presented in Table 5. 2, which gives data for the amount of time spent per day outside the home for samples of participants in the three groups. The younger employed group spends the greatest amount of time away from the home environment (mean= 7. 86 hours), followed by the younger unemployed group (mean= 4. 25 hours). On average, the elderly participants spent only 1. 9 hours outside the home. Out of the ten people in the elderly group, three did

Table 5.1 Numbers of Places Mentioned.

	65+	unemp	emp
mean	9.41	17.82	20.10
S.D.	2.08	6.16	6.06
n=	34	22	10

Table 5.2 Time Spent Outside the Home.

	65+	unemp	emp
mean	1.9	4.25	7.86
S.D	1.8	3.5	4.15
n=	10	10	10

Table 5.3 Usage of Places Outside the Home.  
(percentages)

Category	place	65+	unemp	emp
SERVICES	gen services	18	64	90
	caring-medic	32	32	10
	caring-soc	0	9	0
	self-help	3	18	0
	benefits	15	9	10
	education	15	68	10
	religion	21	36	0
WORKPLACE	workplace	0	55	100
ACTIVITIES	sports	12	36	60
	hobbies	21	23	40
	keep fit	0	9	10
SOCIAL	family	79	77	90
	friends	26	73	100
SHOPS	local	65	9	78
	centre	71	73	90
ENTERTAINMENT	pubs	15	77	70
	clubs	29	45	20
	theatres	0	14	60
	outdoors	47	77	60
	eating out	6	18	70
	holidays	41	5	50
	watching sport	3	5	10
	friendly assoc	9	0	0
	pensioners' club	9	0	0
n=		34	22	10



not go outside their houses at all.

Table 5. 3 provides a more detailed breakdown of the places outside the home that are used by participants. This shows that not only are there quantitative differences between groups, but there are also qualitative differences.

i. Service Places. Overall, the biggest users of services are the unemployed, although all groups are users to some extent. However, the elderly tend to use different service places, such as medical care facilities and churches. Conversely they tend to use general, services and places of education much less than other groups.

ii. Work Places. Not surprisingly, the elderly are not involved with places of work or employment. However, it should be noted that half the unemployed sample see themselves as engaged in some form of work outside the home, such as voluntary work, the black economy, training and the use of skill centres. This is totally absent from the sample of elderly people that were interviewed.

iii. Activities. Elderly people seem to be less frequent users of these places, notably places for sports and health and fitness. Sport is a major pastime

for both the employed and unemployed groups, but there are also qualitative differences. For example, the only sport mentioned by elderly participants was bowls, whereas the other groups tended to pursue more vigorous sports such as swimming. Although vigorous sport and exercise is not the exclusive preserve of the young (over-65 swimming sessions are extremely popular at Newcastle baths), this is a notable absentee from the lifestyle of the elderly participants, despite price reductions for pensioners at local sports facilities.

iv. Social Life. Visiting the homes of family and relatives is a major part of geographical experience of all groups. However, visiting friends is much less frequent amongst the elderly. One can speculate on the possible reasons for this. The gradual loss of friends through death or removal from the locality may be an important factor. Whatever the reason the scope of the social world of the elderly seems to be more restricted than for younger groups.

v. Shopping Shopping is a major aspect of geographical experience of all groups. It is the only category of place where the elderly are not less frequent users than other groups.

vi. Entertainment. Overall, fewer elderly people use places of entertainment than in other groups, although

there are significant proportions in most of the categories. Again there are differences in the type of places used by the elderly. For example, the elderly participants tended not to go to pubs or theatres. In respect to places of entertainment, friendly associations, such as the Townswomen's Guild, are unique to the elderly group, as are old people's clubs.

Overall. There are only four categories of places where the elderly are the major users: medical facilities; benefit offices; friendly associations and pensioners' clubs. Moreover, with the exception of medical care, these are all of marginal importance. Conversely, there is a larger number of places which are more or less outside the current patterns of usage of older people. In particular, socialising outside the home and going to places of entertainment are much more restricted for the elderly group.

This brief analysis indicates that participants within the elderly group tend to have a more restricted geographic range than do people in the other two groups. Moreover, the elderly seem to be restricted in terms of the variety of places that they use. This, together with the fact that elderly people spent considerably more time within the house, suggests that the home environment may be of greater significance for the elderly than for other groups. This proposition was



tested by asking participants to group the places they used according to how important they saw them. In all cases, participants allocated their home to the highest level of importance. However, there was an interesting distinction between the evaluations of the elderly and the two younger groups. In the case of the elderly, most participants (80%) said that their home was the most important place above all others. For younger age groups, however, the common response was to allocate a number of places to the most important category (70% employed, 80% unemployed). In other words, home was not uniquely important for the younger groups. It is outside the scope of the present project to examine this in detail. Nevertheless, certain distinctions suggest themselves. For example, half the employed people rated their workplace as important as their homes. Within the unemployed group, a great deal of significance was attached to purposive activities outside the house, such as training and education.

It is likely that if people in the younger groups were asked to name the single most important place for them they would indicate their homes. However, the point is that, within the context of the categorisation task, elderly participants spontaneously said that their homes were of greatest personal significance. From the objective data on place usage and from participants own evaluations one can conclude that the home environment

has a greater significance for the older participants within the study. One must attempt to define the why and wherefore of this increased focus on the home environment in later life.

#### REASONS FOR THE INCREASING FOCUS ON HOME.

The issue of home focus was examined by directly asking participants the following question:

"Do you think a person's home becomes more important to them when they get older?"

In response to the question, 40 out of 50 people replied in the affirmative, saying that home does become more important. Nobody said that the home becomes less important, and the remaining ten people said that there was no difference. Of these ten people, most stressed that they had always valued their homes very highly. Also, some of the very old participants had lived in the same circumstances for many years and it is understandable that they might reply in the negative. Thus, there is considerable evidence to support the contention that older people are more "focused" upon the home environment.

Why is this the case? To investigate this question, participants' responses were content analysed to produce the set of meaning categories presented in Table 5. 4. The content analysis suggests that the increasing significance of home in later life is related to six issues: interests in the home; spending more time at home; a feeling of permanence; independence; attachment; security. These are discussed in turn.

i Interests in the home.

A number of participants (5) saw their homes as being the centre for doing the things in which they are interested. All of these people were men and all except one were under 72 years old. The men were engaged in very active interests: a railway enthusiast; home improvements; modelling in wood; and taking an Open University course. Only one person mentioned fairly passive pursuits such as reading, contemplation and listening to music. Bearing this in mind, one can suppose that these activities replaced, to some extent, the full-time work on which these men were engaged before they retired. This interpretation is supported by the statements of the people themselves: "keeping occupied is my biggest bugbear" was a typical comment.

In terms of the significance of the home, these people are using their house as a base or location for



Table 5.4 Reasons for increasing focus on the home

Category	No. of people using category
Interests at home	5
Stay at home more	15
Independence	7
Attachment	13
Permanence	16
Refuge/security	5
	(n=48)

their interests since retirement. To an extent, the place itself is incidental to the activity. Although the activities represent a positive adaptation to retirement, the increased use of the home reflects a reduction in "reach", rather than an active reorientation. In this sense, the home takes on a greater significance because other significant places have been lost. This is also largely the case with the next category.

ii. Spending more time at home.

This was one of the two largest content categories, with 15 people saying that home becomes more important because older people spend more time in the place. The full implications of the answer are not straightforward. At one level, spending more time at home may be a function of social roles and a corresponding reduction in the places used by the person. As with the last category, the home accrues more importance by default, simply because it is used more. People's responses indicated that this loss of spatial "reach" has a number of origins. Firstly, older people seem to have a more limited access to significant non-home places; "there is nowhere else to go" (19). The loss of the workplace on retirement is an important part of this situation, while there seems to be fewer non-home places that "cater" for

older people's needs. Secondly, a decline in income was also seen to constrain activities outside the home. Finally, some people mentioned that increasing physical frailty meant that they stayed at home more.

Although there may be other reasons, the point is that factors outside the control of the individual act to constrain people's activities and spatial reach. However, this ignores the increased personal and symbolic significance accorded to home by most of the people in the study. Indeed, spending more time in the home is not merely a matter of constraint; many people actively prefer to spend more time in the home:

"Years ago, I used to be out every night, but now the days go by and you don't think nothing about it like. You like to be in the house more. I went into town yesterday. I wasn't away long. I went to see the bowls in Eldon Square. Just a couple of hours, that was enough like. I was glad to get home. You're not so keen on running round. It's just your age. You know you can't do the things you used to do. Now I just like to go to the club for a couple of pints and that used to be nothing when I was younger" (74).

For this man, the loss of capability restricted his activities. However, home was not something that he



simply spent more time in. It was a place where he actively preferred to spend his time. For many of the people interviewed, going out to other places was just a matter of breaking the routine, rather than something that was particularly valued in itself. The most anticipated and significant aspect of going out was the return home. Thus, one should not discuss the increasing significance of the home only in terms of constraints, but also in terms of what the individual makes of their circumstances.

### iii. Permanence.

"Permanence" is the second of the two most significant content categories. The idea of "permanence" is that the home provides a solid and sure foundation to one's life. This issue points to the basic affordance of the home, that it is the domain of the individual, who has control over that particular space. This basic right was important for one lady:

"Yes, your home does become more important to you when you are older. You know it's yours and you cannot be put out of it. In your old age you need something like that don't you" (58).

The value of having a permanent home, is the

knowledge that it will always be there. This affords a sense of comfort and security. Many people emphasised this point in terms of "returning home", which was discussed in Chapter 4. This is illustrated by the following example:

"It's something to cling to. It's something you've saved for all your life and now you have got it. It anchors you doesn't it? If we go to our son's house we enjoy it. We get waited on there. But I am glad to get back home. Just because it is home; all your own things around you. I suppose I can please myself at my son's house, but it is still home here. You are free" (28)

This woman brings together a number of themes within her environmental experience, all of which contribute to her perception that home has become a more important place for her. She is aware that the house is a material expression of herself. It is something that she and her husband have worked for all their lives, and now she appreciates home as something solid and permanent that now supports them, both physically and symbolically, in later life. For this woman, and many others, the contrast between home and non-home is clearly appreciated. Her son's house was seen as somewhere that was passed through before she returned home, even though both places offered similar levels of

comfort and personal freedom.

iv. Home as refuge.

"Permanence" also contributes to the home as a "refuge" or "sanctuary". Home is a place of privacy, and where one feels psychologically secure. Many people mentioned that they preferred the seclusion of the home as they got older:

"When you are younger, you don't attach that much importance to it. When you are older, you get more attached to it. When you get about 55, you are getting old. You get more homely, more for your carpet slippers and that. You get to know all the nooks and crannies, whereas when you are young you don't take any notice. It's more of a necessity when you are older. It is a place of refuge really. When you were young, you didn't care" (72).

The interesting question is why this change in attitude occurs in later life. One man suggested a possible answer:

"With younger people, you are living your life, meeting new people and that. I have done all that.



You see different people and get disillusioned. You find that freedom is not all that it is cracked up to be. You just want to sit and watch the world go by, in a modicum of comfort" (63).

This statement was not meant to be cynical, but represented a man's honest opinion of the world, based on his own experience and judgement. For him, many of the things that were valued in earlier years are vacuous and illusory, and of little relevance to him in the present. In contrast, the home is seen as a secure and reliable aspect of life. His attitude was not universal amongst participants, but it was common.

#### v. Independence.

Seven of the participants felt that home was more important because they could be independent there. Participants emphasised the freedom and choice afforded by the home. Home is a place where you can be yourself, without having to consider other people. There are distinct parallels between this issue and what has emerged in the discussion of "permanence" and "refuge". Certainly, independence can be understood in terms of the privacy afforded by the home. For example:

"Just speaking for myself, I do think your home

becomes more important when you get older. It's always something to come back to. A home of your own is better than being put into one of these prisons they call an old folks home. I prefer my own home. Nowadays, you have home helps and everything. You're independent in your own home. You appreciate your home more. If your house has always been clean you can say 'right, I'll keep it that way', and I can please myself here; get up when I like, have my meals when I like" (56).

This man involved both a feeling of permanence, control and privacy in a heightened appreciation of the home. It was widely observed amongst the participants that one does not appreciate home until later years. With the onset of old age, the potential loss of personal capabilities, or the fear of the old folks home, highlight the value of the home.

#### vi. Attachment to home.

Over a quarter of the participants said that they had become more attached to their homes. Although the term is often used as a throw-away remark, there were indications that attachment involves certain consistent themes. In particular, attachment to place is something

that grows over time. Through living in a place many years, one has memories associated with the place, and in this way a person "invests" a good deal of themselves in personal objects and the dwelling-place itself. The appropriation of the home space in terms of personal meanings often serves to create a unique and potent bond between person and place. Metaphors such as "rooted" and "anchored" were used to express this relationship.

So far the analysis has provided a general evaluation of home focus, and a number of consistent themes have been identified in participants' accounts of their home experience. In the following sections these themes are developed and extended in the presentation of a number of case studies.

#### MRS CHARLTON

Mrs Charlton was born in 1918. She lost her husband in 1978 after nearly 40 years of marriage. She has four children; two sons live in London and a son and a daughter live in Newcastle. She has lived in her council house in Scotswood since 1950. She is a fit lady who prides herself on her independence. Although Mrs Charlton is a very friendly and chatty lady, she prefers to lead a quiet life at home:



"I went out last night to Whickham View bingo. I never go usually, but I went last night. It was great and I really enjoyed myself. I met people I used to work with and I got to hear all the news. I really enjoyed it. I didn't like the bingo particularly, but I liked seeing my friends. I won't go again particularly- I wouldn't go regular. I am a home bird. I was there and I was thinking 'there is a program on telly I was missing', and I was disappointed that I had missed it. That's how much I go out at night"!

For Mrs Charlton, home is the most important place. She accords no real value or necessity to any other place. She is not particularly interested in going out and even when she is away her concern still lies mainly with home and her return:

"I go for days out sometimes. Last year I went to Scotland on a days tour. They're what I like. I don't fancy long holidays anymore. I went away for seven weeks once. I had the time of my life in Saudi, but I was dying to get back. I just wanted to get back home- to shut the door and stay there. It's my favourite place I suppose".

In Mrs Charlton's case, her focus on the home is a

matter of personal choice. She has children living locally, she has friends and relatives. She has no physical impairment that restrict her movements or activities. She has plenty of opportunities for visiting or doing things outside the home. Yet she chooses a more solitary existence. She sees herself very much as a 'loner', a characteristic that is reflected in her geographical experience:

"I like to go to the Civic Centre for a walk. I make a day of it. I have a walk around the church and walk around the garden. I like to go on my own. I prefer my own company in the town. I have a great imagination. I just like to see the things around and when you are with other people they spoil your train of thought. When you are a loner, you have your own company. The time you (the researcher) are here- it fills your time in for days, not just the time you are here. When you are with your thoughts, it's like as if you've got company. I don't need anybody. It's not like two people, but it feels like company".

Thus, not only is Mrs Charlton primarily concerned with her home, even going out is largely a matter of being alone. Obviously, the home can play a major part in maintaining the life of the 'loner'- the basic affordance of the home is that it is the domain of the

individual, where the external world of others can be effectively excluded. For Mrs Charlton, home is a refuge, a place of sanctuary to which she can return:

"I like to be in my own home best. The world is changing. You enjoy seeing the changes, but it is a sin to see a lot of the lovely old places being knocked down and that. I love to go out and see all the changes, but I like to come back and get home. I'll tell you what it is like. I went to Denmark once and I was seasick on the boat. I was glad to be back on terra firma. That is what it is like to be back home. I think 'thank God I am home'. It's the only place you can feel like that. I like to go out, but there is nothing I like better than getting back.

In the case of Mrs Charlton it is possible to see the congruence of psychic and physical space. Mrs Charlton is essentially introspective, a focus that is reflected in, and perhaps reinforced by, a spatial focus on the home. At this point, it is possible to make two assertions about the geographical experience of Mrs Charlton. Firstly, her spatial focus is on the home. And secondly, this focus is voluntary, or at least a matter of choice rather than constraint. A deeper understanding of how and why this focus came about can be gained by reviewing the biographical details of Mrs



Charlton. Mrs Charlton identified three personally significant areas of change in her life in the recent past, all of which have implications for her geographical experience. These are: her retirement from work; the death of her husband; and her youngest son leaving home.

Considering the value that Mrs Charlton had placed upon her job, it could have been expected that she would have had difficulty making the transition to retirement. This is especially so given that going back to work a fortnight after the death of her husband had been helpful to adjustment in that respect. Initial difficulties, however, seem to have been superseded by new opportunities:

"I missed work at first, but then I did a lot of things I never did before, that I didn't have the chance to do before. You used to scramble for holidays, but now you can leisurely have a days out whenever you feel like it. Used to go down the coast with my sister-in-law. I never had the chance before, because I was working. I work at home. I did more sewing after finishing than I did before. I had time to read all the books I wanted to. I can watch TV, whereas I never really had time before".

Mrs Charlton did mention some negative aspects to retirement, such as loneliness and the lack of money. However, she plays these down and emphasises the opportunities rather than the constraints of retirement:

"I can't say I am lonely, because I like my own company after being hassled by being among all those girls at work. You were glad of your home even when you were working- getting away from the hassle. This was peace perfect peace. You spend more time in it. You feel that that why should you worry about that when you have your own place. Nothing is going to change the world, so just curl up at home and make the most of what you have got".

What she can do and where she can go is constrained by a lack of money, but there are many concessions for pensioners. For example, travel on public transport is free in Tyne and Wear. Many older people like to visit the coast, at such places as Whitley Bay or Tynemouth. Mrs Charlton used to go to the coast for the day with her sister-in-law, but these sort of excursions have become increasingly rare. She chooses rather to spend most of her time at home, and has found retirement a pleasant experience.

The second major life change was the death of her

husband. Mr and Mrs Charlton had both just turned sixty when her husband died unexpectedly:

"It was a shock- but it is seven years ago next month. I never thought I would live a year without him. You get over it, but you don't forget. You forget all the misery about it. You have all the happy memories, the little funny things. I always used to imagine his coming home- out of the rain and shaking his coat. I went back to work a fortnight after. That got me over the hump. Also, the son had come back home. That helped, that got me on the level"

Although upset at the loss of her husband, she is a very resilient person and was able cope with getting on with her life. Mrs Charlton has now come to terms with being alone, and indeed solitude is something that she cultivates since the death of her husband:

"I just want to be on my own now. I like the children to come, but I like them to go as well. You get depressed. I had a bad chest and I felt very depressed, but you are glad to be on your own. You don't want to bore people by saying that you're poorly all the time. I don't ever want to be dependent on anybody. You realise, when you are left on your own, just how important the home is,



because that is all you have left".

The third life change to consider is the moving away from the family home of Mrs Charlton's children, especially her youngest son. For her, family life was the centre of home experience:

"It's the mother and father who make the home, who love the kids and put your kids first. When I was expecting, I sewed every article. Nowadays they just go out and buy them. Nowadays, I just live by myself. I live on my memories. It's all you've got. It's just you're memories when you get to 67 isn't it".

Her children moving was a source of sorrow to Mrs Charlton. But it was something to which she was resigned:

"You are sort of prepared for it. You know they are going to get married and move out. But I missed them terribly. Then I had my husband and I knew they weren't far away and that I would see them. Work was something to wrap yourself in".

At the time of her husband's death, Mrs Charlton's youngest son had returned to live at home. This helped her to cope with her bereavement. The eventual

departure of her son left her alone for the first time. This was perhaps the most difficult time for Mrs Charlton:

"When he left I was really upset. I was left on my own with no work to go to. That was a miss. I was not miserable and that, but it was a miss. It was just so quiet, but after you come out of a noisy factory you are glad. Things were a lot quieter here. You know what it's like when they are getting ready to go out- wanting this and that. It was a lot quieter when they left".

It is possible to see the events in Mrs Charlton's recent past as a transitional period; each event as a stage leading from a full home life to a life alone. It can be suggested that her losses were incremental, making the transition easier. This seems to be the case. For example, the presence of her son helped her to cope with her husband's death, while her being at work was something to wrap herself in after her children had left. However, at the end of this process she was still left alone, a situation to which she had to adjust. It is difficult to attempt to reconstruct this coping process. However, Mrs Charlton seems to have made the adjustment successfully. Her general statements about her life and the more objective measurement (the PGC Morale scale) indicate that she is

basically happy and content in her life. She is happy although it is "a different kind of happiness". Obviously, her present situation is not something that she desired, but it is a situation to which she has become reconciled, to the extent that the solitude is something that she values:

"But I just want to be on my own now. I like the children to come, but I like them to go. Home is all I have left. It doesn't have to be all I have left, but I prefer it to be. I don't know whether I would like them to live here now after they've been away so long, but it would be worse me living with them".

One of the recurring observations by Mrs Charlton was that being left alone allowed her, for the first time, to be able to take stock of her life:

"You had a fuller life. Twenty years ago you had all your family at home- a lot of hard work and no time to think. You'd be out at work and then get back home and work. It's a lot quieter now. Things come back to you- the son broke his arm and fractured his skull- you remember these little tribulations".

Mrs Charlton responded to the solitude of home as a



place of quietness and of calm, rather than as a place of emptiness and desolation. As mentioned earlier, she sees her home as 'terra firma' as opposed to the 'sea' of the outside world. This is a powerful image; the tranquility afforded by the home is clearly very important to Mrs Charlton. It also indicates the nature of her readjustment to life alone. The losses in her life are regretted, but her statements imply that her situation is construed positively. There is a sense of relief, that she can now lead a pleasant quiet life in her later years:

"You don't have to go anywhere. There are no 'musts'. There are no places that I go to regular. I am very haphazard. I can get on a bus with the intention of going to Benwell and keep on going into town. I have learned to content myself with doing things as I want to do them. I don't go mad at things like I used to. I used to be houseproud, but I don't go at it half as much as I used to".

Being alone allows time to think and reflect. It removes many of the imperatives and structures that give life a certain direction and momentum in earlier periods of a person's life. For Mrs Charlton, the changes in her life were accompanied by a reorientation in both her attitudes and behaviours. Possibly, this was an outcome of not being tied to previous routines. She has always

seen herself as a 'loner'; a self-perception that can now be realised. She became more conscious of her life situation; and this consciousness was directed towards a quieter and more introspective existence.

This reorientation is paralleled in the person-home relationship. Home had played an important role throughout her life; it was the scene of family life, it was the place where she could relax after work. However, in many respects, the home was taken for granted during these earlier years. One of the outcomes of Mrs Charlton's adjustment to her present situation was that she began to attach greater significance to her home. Although it had always been significant, Mrs Charlton became conscious of its true value for the first time:

"Home becomes more important to you when you are older. You do change to feel like that. When you are working, you never think about it. You are worrying about your family and that. It's only when you have time to sit and think that you realise it. You realise, when you are left on your own, just how important the home is, because that is all you have left. I would never leave my home. It is more important to me over the years. It's your castle, it's all you have in life. It is everything. You get depressed. The house

depresses you sometimes and you want to get out. But it is the same with anyone. But two minutes being out and I want to be back. I just feel as if the house is wrapped around me and protects me and that. At the beginning of last year, I had awful trouble with my ear, but just to be in the house and wrapped around, that was my comfort. I was in hospital and I was very ill. I begged to be sent home. After I came home, I was better in two days".

But the increased significance of home is not just a matter of becoming conscious of its value. It has also become the focus of Mrs Charlton's reorientation in life. She says that it is all she has left. But she is still very close to her children and she has her memories, and she has the opportunity to go out socially. What Mrs Charlton is emphasising is the symbolic role of the home for her. "Home" has become the main focus for the things that she values most. It is possible to identify a number of key themes in Mrs Charlton's home experience.

i. Home as continuity.

Mrs Charlton had been devoted to her family. This emphasis is reflected in her present attitude to life.



She still sees herself as being married and values her role as a mother. Her home is an important link in maintaining the continuity of family life".

"Home- out of your whole life, it's the only thing that you have got left. When you are left on your own it's your memories. I liken it to- people who are left as widows. Some are stupid and say they have to go out and get a man; go to the over 60's club just hoping to find another fella. It disgusts me. I would think I was being a traitor to my husband. That's what I think about the house. It must be the influence. I feel that he is still here. You realise that when you are left on your own how important the home is, now that it is all you have left. If I left, I feel that I would be leaving my husband".

This feeling was quite common amongst participants in the research who were bereaved. The home is seen as all that is left of one's life. Memories, happy or unhappy, are inextricably linked to the specific place. To lose the place is also to lose a vital but tenuous link with the valued past. In Mrs Charlton's case, she nurtures these family associations. Her links to the family of the past and to the family of the present are preserved in the context of the home:

"When you are on your own, you feel that someday you'll have your family together again- your husband and your children. You feel as if it might someday be like it used to be. They used to argue like blazes, but it was still home and they still think that this is home to them, no matter how far away they are, it is always THEIR home. That's important to me. I don't know why. I just think it's important that you had so much love in here. They are never frightened of being loving to me here. I say to them that I will always be here. I don't suppose it is the house itself. It's where the person is. Home is where I am. The sons still think of this as home to them".

ii. Vicarious experience.

Mrs Charlton's world has shrunk, in terms of activities, social contacts and geographical reach. Mrs Charlton feels that a little goes a long way in filling her days; a few hours in town and she is refreshed. In many respects, direct experiences, such as visiting and going out, have been replaced by vicarious experience. She has become less concerned with the things she does herself than with the doings of her children.

"I have never been one for visiting. I never go

much to my son's. I could count on two fingers how many times I have been up there. I don't visit them, but I know that they are there. Places where you know people are, and you can go to if you need them. The phone is important- I can ring them. I would do without anything and pay my phone bill. You are concerned about them all the time and thinking of them. I am there in my imagination. They are important in my mind. I can talk to them on the phone. They tell me what they've done, like the flowers they've been putting in the garden, and I am there in my thoughts you know- it's your imagination".

In Mrs Charlton's own words, she is with her children in her 'imagination'. This should not be seen in negative terms. Simply because emphasis is placed on memories or upon the achievements of others, rather than more direct material experiences and activities, does not detract from the richness or quality of Mrs Charlton's life. Loneliness or feelings of emptiness are not a matter of the number or duration of social contacts, but how the individual interprets them.

### iii. Defining new activities.

Although much of what Mrs Charlton values is in terms of



continuity and vicarious experience, her life is not simply backward-looking or introspective. Indeed, her present situation is also construed by her in very positive terms; being alone affords opportunities of which she had previously been unaware:

"Being on my own, I can please myself. There's no time thing on you. I don't have to go to bed or that if I don't want to. You just rather be in the home after you have lived and worked all your life. Fancy being such a fool, working for other people. Why didn't I spend more time in the house. I was always rushing about. This is lovely. I have put four stones on since I retired- so it's been marvellous for me. It's smashing doing what I want to do now. I never had a cup of tea in bed in my life. I now make one every day and go back to bed with it.

Thus, Mrs Charlton has found a new set of interests and activities. These can be seen, to some extent, as taking the place of many of the activities of earlier years, such as work or her role as a wife and mother. It is perhaps surprising that, in many ways, she finds these new activities more satisfying. In some ways, her life previously had been outside her control. She valued work, but talked about it as a "hassle". She loved her family, but found her duties very demanding.

Being alone allowed her to do what she wanted, and she clearly appreciates this aspect of her present situation.

#### MR ALLEN

Mr Allen is 86. He is in very good health and does not show his age. He lives with his wife in a flat that he has had for 46 years. He says that he is no longer interested in doing things or going out, and that he is quite content to spend most of his time at home. Apart from the occasional shopping trip, the only real outside interest he has is going to the Newcastle auction rooms to buy things for the flat. He has a daughter who lives in York. Although he has been to stay with her, this has only been very occasionally. Mr Allen says that in the past, he was hardly ever at home. For example, he was a master of ceremonies at a local dance-hall until he was 60. For Mr Allen it is not possible to relate an increasing focus on home to specific events. Rather, the increasing focus on home in his case has been a gradual, incremental process. A number of salient features emerge in the home experience of Mr Allen are discussed below.

Mr Allen suggested that as he has got older he has

"got more tired", that he no longer has the desire to do things or the energy that he had when he was younger:

"You don't have the same desire to go out doing things, but if you have the inclination, you haven't got the energy to do anything. How many of the over 80's have got energy to do anything. Nobody has as much energy when they are older. Nothing, mechanical or human, gets better with age. Everybody has their aches and pains. You just have to accept it. Nobody wants to hear people moaning. You have to look on the bright side and get out and do things. People moan all the time. We both have arthritis, but you just have to put up with it".

But for Mr Allen, this was not just a matter of physical tiredness, there is the drive to do things as well:

"You don't have the same desire to go out". I used to go dancing and that, but I got tired of it. I began to get fed up with it. I did it for 12 years. I go paid for it. I used to be the MC there. There used to be different groups on each night, young people and old people. I got sick of it. I was 60 and I thought that was enough. I looked for an excuse to get out. I had a row with the band leader and finished there. I was tired of



being an MC. I was tired of it. I felt I couldn't be bothered with the young people and that. I just gave it up".

Mr Allen's case suggests that the reduction in activities and spatial range is not just a matter of constraint and capability. It is also important to look at issues such as motivation and commitment. As with Mr Allen, it is understandable that one becomes "tired" of, or loses interest in, something that has been previously valued.

A second issue relates to Mr Allen's awareness of a relationship between age and place. Mr Allen sees himself as an old person. He feels that the world is for younger people and that old people are excluded from the mainstream of social life. This social separation has a parallel spatial dimension; an issue of which Mr Allen is keenly aware, in terms of an age-place relationship:

"It's a different generation. Everything is different. Everything is geared up for the younger people. You are only a nuisance. There are exceptions, but in the majority there's no place for old people. Younger people think old people are a bother; having to do things for them. We used to go to dances and the theatre and the

pictures. We used to be out every night. I loved dancing. I used to go dancing every night. But you can't do that when you are getting old men and women. You don't want to be seen tripping the light fantastic anymore. You see these old folk, at these over-60's clubs, dancing away and they can hardly walk. They look ridiculous; pathetic".

For Mr Allen, the process of ageing has been one of gradual reduction in the opportunity and scope of social and spatial interaction. One of the outcomes of this process is that home has taken on a greater significance; by default home becomes the place that is appropriate to old age: "you spend more time in your home when you are old, so it has to be more important". But the significance of home in later life goes beyond this simple equation; home offers the instrumental and symbolic means for maintaining one's independence:

"We are staying put here. Pat (daughter who lives in York) has asked us to go down to York, but no fear. You cannot expect young people to run their life for old people. A lot of old people are very greedy and selfish. They expect a lot by divine right for people to do things for them. You can get lots of help if you want it; a home help, meals on wheels. You get the rent paid and that and a lot of old people are not grateful".

Mr Allen is sensitive to his position in society as he perceives it. He feels that being old does not justify making claims on others. Equally, he is aware that home is the basis for an independent life in old age; a place where one can live without feelings of obligation to others, while statutory rights afford support where necessary.

Although Mr Allen feels that there is "no place for old people", there are opportunities for older people to extend their activities and social life in different directions. These range from places specifically for pensioners, such as over-sixties clubs. Other activities such as bowls is very popular amongst the elderly people who were interviewed. Also, the availability of free travel allows easy access around Tyne and Wear. However, Mr Allen has chosen not to take advantage of these opportunities:

"Over 60's clubs are alright for some, but I don't like following the crowds. You see pictures of them doing their physical jerks and that. You see, we don't pretend that we are anything other than old people. I don't care for bowls and over 60's clubs and that. I can't stand these places where you have a 'life and soul of the party'; people who organise you. People follow around like sheep.



That's not for me".

Although Mr Allen' increased focus on home would seem to be a personal choice and not due to external constraints, it could be argued that this choice may not have been one that was made happily. However, Mr Allen was seemed very happy with life in general (as measured by the PGC morale scale), and actually preferred being at home:

"I have never liked any place better than my home. There is no better place than here for me. You used to go out more. You don't like it any more, but you spend more time in it. We like to go on holiday and that, but I would never want to live there. I am quite happy doing what we are doing; keeping alive as long as possible. We are not stagnant. We get out and about. Some old people just use their place to eat and sleep, especially, among the men. They spend most of their time at the clubs. A lot of people can't be bothered. They neglect themselves and their houses. But you have to be bothered. You have to look after yourselves. I just like being here most of the time. Some people get all their pleasures outside. We are home birds. We have the television and are quite content".

MR WARNER

Mr Warner is 76 and has been widowed 14 years. He has four children; two live abroad, while a son and a daughter still live in Tyneside. Mr Warner is very active with has many interests, such as golf, going for days out, and going out for drinks with friends. He is also "friendly" with a widow who lives locally, who he sees several times a week. Mr Warner has a very positive image of himself:

"I have always been a young old person. Most of my interests are outside the house you see. I am not like most old people in that way. But I am just turning the corner. I could have been taken for 55 when I was 75. I have had no physical problem at all. I am young physically, and in attitude. I kept my interests up, going out to the club. Also, my sporting interest has been important. I like my golf. I am in seventh heaven with golf.

However, he says that recently he has been feeling his age. This is mostly reflected in his physical ability to do things. He finds that he can't play as much golf as he did, that he is more easily tired and that he does not have as much energy for doing things.

But getting older for Mr Warner is not just a physical change. He says that he has become forgetful, a symptom of old age that he finds particularly disturbing. Mr Warner also feels that his social life has become more restricted:

"The social life and that is still there, but it's not what it used to be. It's the old way and the new. The younger generation is completely different in a lot of ways. You cannot join in with the younger ones. You find that they don't want to know. Normally, if I am in their company, I just sit and keep quiet. You can't join in as you'd like to nowadays. I used to go to the West Denton Club a lot. I used to go with the widow I know, but she doesn't like going now. She used to go for the company, but she doesn't go now. I go to the pub now instead with my son-in law. It's a regular thing. I make a point of going out".

Although Mr Warner sees himself as a "young old man", he is perhaps at a point where his life is changing. Indeed, Mr Warner is insistent that there has been a significant change in himself over the last two years, even though he cannot relate this change to any specific event or cause. He has begun to realise that he is "old", and to define his life accordingly:



"I am going over to America to see my son and his family next year. It's for the last time. I just want to see them. It doesn't matter where they are, that's not important, just as long as I get to see them. I am not sentimental like, but it is important you see".

Mr Warner is not just feeling his age, he is also aware that his life may be near to its end, and he wishes to see his children and grandchildren for the "last time". At the moment, Mr Warner's life is not focused on his home, and he admits that "most of my interests are outside the house. He believes that a person's home does become more important when they are older:

"Home is the only necessity though. If I can't manage to do things like I used to, I suppose I will have to take life a bit easier. It's not a matter of liking it better, you just might have to be there more".

At this point, it is useful to examine how Mr Warner uses, and feels about, his home. Interestingly, his home experience mirrors a distinction he makes between his private and social self:

"Being here makes me feel at home. I can be at

home by myself. I can lead two different lives; as a loner, and in company. It's comfortable, warm and tidy here. I like being on my own here, out of company. I like to be a loner. To sit and think about things, reminisce".

For Mr Warner there is a demarcation between the home as a place for privacy, and outside as the place for his interests, enjoyment and socializing. Moreover, this situation is not something that has unintentionally developed. Mr Warner values this demarcation and acts to preserve it. For example, he decided not to remarry:

"I like to come home. You cannot put it down on paper. Two years after the wife died, I became friendly with a widow, but I never married her. I just like to come back to my own house. I have a lot of friends. I live for golf now. That gets me out".

Since he was widowed he has rebuilt his life by focusing on things outside the home. But his home plays an important part in his life; home is the place in which the past is preserved. His home acts as the source of continuity between the past and the present:

"I just like it. It's past and gone for an old

man. Being at home now is different to what it used to be. You haven't the family here. But I am quite happy here on my own. I am still content here. I have the old photographs. I come back to them. Everything is nostalgic now, even for childhood. I was a lucky kiddy. I had typhoid at four. I would lose something if I moved from here. The different parts of the house brings back memories and that, which I think would go if I left here".

There seems to be a tension between Mr Warner's two "selves", which is preserved by the use of place. However, it may be that he is at a point where the balance of this tension is changing. Certainly, his belief that he is now feeling "old" may mean that he is placing less emphasis on outside activities and that his life outside home may be becoming less significant. For example, there are some activities which he does not find pleasurable anymore:

"I go into town shopping a couple of times a week. I used to go in daily when I was first widowed. I don't go for pleasure now. It's packed with kiddies and teenagers fighting now. It's not pleasurable. It's too full. It's changed a lot, for the worst. It's not worth going into town. It used to be a pleasure in 1970. It's a nightmare



now. It's spoilt going into town for me".

The issues discussed here suggests that Mr Warner's life may become increasingly home-focused. To a large extent, this could be attributed to factors such as personal capability or external constraints. However, it should be recognized that home is something that is highly valued by Mr Warner, and an increased emphasis on life at home may not be unwelcome.

#### CONCLUSION.

To summarize, the hypothesis that the home takes on greater significance in later life seems to be supported at a general level both by data on the usage of places and by participants own subjective evaluations of their place experience. Certainly, most of the older participants agreed with the proposition and offered a number of possible explanations. These have been discussed individually in some detail, but it is possible to place these explanations within a more general framework.

i. Constraints of the Present. There seems to be an increased focus on the home due to constraints on the activities of the older participants and the places they

use. This refers to both the physical abilities of the elderly and the opportunities they have for activities outside the home. As one person said: ". . . everything is geared up for younger people". The outcome is that there is a tendency to spend more time in the home. It is possible to detect a note of resignation in the attitudes of the older participants. With the elderly, substitution of new activities for the loss of employment on retirement does not seem to be significant. This is in contrast with the younger unemployed participants who often pursued alternative activities outside the home.

ii. A Concern for the Future. The home seems to be an important factor in maintaining a sense of independence amongst elderly people. This perhaps reflects an awareness of the possibilities of the future. For example, increasing frailty may make life in an institution a necessity. The home is a permanent and secure point in a changing world and is consciously valued as a symbol of personal competence, and independence.

iii. A Concern for the Past. The older participants often said that they were very attached to their homes. The home can be a place of memories, and it is a link with the past, affording a sense of continuity and permanence. Many older people prefer to be quiet within

the privacy of their own homes.

These insights were a useful starting point for a more in-depth investigation. The case studies illustrated and developed the issues that had emerged from the initial content analysis, but their principle value was to place home focus within the biographical contexts of older individuals. For example, Mrs Charlton had to cope with a number of traumatic life changes. Her home is clearly a central aspect of her present life, and has played an important role in coping with change, both in terms of emotional support and as the focus for the things she now values in life. She has adjusted well to her situation and actually seems to appreciate the privacy of her home and living alone.

In Mr Allen's case it is not possible to point to specific events behind his increased focus on the home environment. Rather he has undergone a gradual reorientation over a number of years. Things that had been previously an important part of his life were dropped one by one and have little relevance to the present. Activities outside the home, such as dancing, have been replaced by a less active life centred on his home.

In a sense, home focus can be seen as "spatial disengagement", in that the decreasing social lifespace



of disengagement theory is paralleled by a decreasing spatial range. Indeed, the content analysis stressed personal capabilities and external "constraints" as major factors in shaping the lives and geographical experience of older people. However, from a biographical perspective, it is important to stress the role of individuals in defining their own situations. For example, although both Mr Allen and Mr Warner felt that they ". . . can't do what I used to", this is not just a matter of physical ability; there seems to be a significant element of personal choice in their situation. The case studies are notable in that each individual provides a distinctive picture of home experience, where the individual plays an important part in both interpreting and defining that experience. This was apparent in the cases of a number of participants in the study, where objectively similar circumstances have produced very different outcomes.

Home focus, then, should be seen as a general tendency for home to take on greater significance in later life. The actual basis of this significance will vary between people, and certainly the notion should not be used deterministically. Nor should home focus be construed in the negative terms of spatial constriction. The case studies indicate that the home environment can be used by individuals as a resource in a positive way, in order to cope with the often difficult circumstances

of later life. The home can be a base for new activities and it can also be a source of emotional support. Two aspects of home experience are of particular significance in later life, and these are explored in the following chapters: home as a basis of independence; and home as a focus of emotional attachment.

## Chapter 6.

### INDEPENDENCE AND HOME.



## INTRODUCTION.

One of the recurrent themes in discussions with participants was the significance of independence. Being independent was an important value for most of the older people. It was something they were proud of, and something which they jealously guarded. Moreover, many participants spontaneously said that their homes played a major role in being independent, and this was an important emerging theme in the discussion of home focus in chapter six. It is the relationship between independence and the home environment that is the subject of the present chapter.

Two problems are addressed, based on the content analysis of participants' responses to a number of open-ended questions. Firstly, it is necessary to define the meaning of independence. This is done by examining the usage of the term within both gerontological literature and, more importantly, the everyday language of the participants themselves. Secondly, what is the relationship between home and independence as defined by the participants? This involves two issues: how do people see their homes contributing towards their independence; and do they see other living arrangements for the elderly, such as old people's homes, as undermining independence in old age.

To illustrate and develop the emerging themes from the content analysis, a number of case studies are also presented.

#### GERONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON INDEPENDENCE.

What does one mean by the term "independence"? At one level it is possible to construe the term as opposite to "dependency". Bond (1976) defines dependency as ". . . the inability of an individual to carry out for him or herself the activities necessary to maintain a normative standard of everyday living". He identifies mobility, personal self-care, housecare capacity, mental capacity, social desolation and social isolation as basic dimensions of everyday living, and incapacity in any of these will require some degree of external intervention, either by informal sources or statutory welfare services. Independence, as the opposite state, is equivalent to autonomy, the ability of the individual to live without relying on external help.

There is a large literature devoted to the measurement of dependency in old age (cf. Abrams, 1978; Hunt, 1978; Wenger, 1984), the main objective of which is to assess the level of "need" for welfare services within the elderly population. It is significant that

gerontological research has emphasised the issue of "dependency" (eg. Townsend, 1981; Phillipson et al, 1986), while relatively little attention has been given to the more positive notion of "independence". This distinction is not a trivial one, but reflects an attitude to old age that is part of social reality and scientific thought, where old age is commonly associated with deterioration. Phillida Salmon (1985) argues that a consequence of this attitude is that, with any sign of failing faculties, the older person is assigned a dependency role

"It is assumed that old people, even if they are not actually bed-ridden, are not able to manage on their own because of physical frailty. The logical thing to do, therefore, is to place them in settings designed to provide physical care and supervision. So putting an old person into an old people's home is seen as responding appropriately to his or her physical needs".

De Jong (1983) argues that disability is a social problem that has been unnecessarily medicalized (Twaddle, 1973; Zola, 1972, 1977), a process that has shaped our perceptions of the capabilities of frail or disabled older people. A central issue here is the extent to which the management of disability should remain within the care system or with the individual.



There is also the issue of the "sick role" for disabled people. The institutions and fabric of society provide certain avenues of behaviour on the part of the elderly that are not easily ignored, and a constant medical presence in a disabled person's life may induce dependency, (De Jong, 1983; Townsend, 1981).

"Independence", as the opposite of "dependency" is largely a term used to objectively describe the capabilities of the older people. However, independence is more than just being able to look after oneself, and it is important to examine what dependency and independence mean to elderly people themselves. At this level the notion of independence may be personally defined and independence and dependency need not be construed as opposites. As Munnichs (1976) points out, for an older person:

"The older person himself does not usually experience himself as dependent. For him his dependency is only perceptible when changes in his existence which concern himself present themselves or are introduced: relocation, admission to hospital, removal to a home for the aged, dying of his partner. These are examples of possible emotional dependency. Indeed, he can become instrumentally more dependent, e. g. through only getting a pension instead of wages, or through

another system of services, but this need not affect his self integrity" (Munnichs, 1976, p6).

This emphasis on the subjective and emotional quality of "self-integrity" seems to be the key to understanding the human experience of "independence". In experiential terms, "independence" is not the same as autonomy. Rather, being independent can be seen as self-determination; the power of the individual to command the necessary resources around him, regardless of disability. There is also an important element of social status in this relationship (van den Heuvel, 1976). Independence is something that is esteemed within society, while dependency is negatively evaluated. In this context one should see independence as an ideal rather than an "objective reality". Munnichs (1976) notes that "being independent" itself derives its meaning and significance from the social context, and that all individuals are to a greater or lesser extent dependent upon their social situation. Thus, it is important to maintain a distinction between independence as a value and as an objectively defined state.

## AN EXPERIENTIAL ANALYSIS OF INDEPENDENCE.

When talking about "independence", one is dealing with a complex and subjective phenomenon. Nevertheless, "independence" exists as a highly pertinent value amongst older people and should be seen as no less "real" for all its subjective connotations. If one is to understand the role of the home in affording independence, then it is important to examine how older people conceptualise and use the notion of independence. This was done by asking the following open-ended question, with participants being encouraged to talk as freely as possible:

Retired people seem to value their independence a great deal. What does being independent mean to you?

The content analysis of the responses revealed three consistent themes, representing different modes of being independent. Firstly, independence was used in the sense of being able to look after yourself, that is not being dependent on other people. For example:

"Take away your independence and you are finished. People finish themselves. They get people to do this and that for them. I am the most independent



person in the world. I like to be able to do things for myself. If you're not independent, you are relying on everybody all the time. You just deteriorate and that's it" (56).

This interpretation approximates the view of independence as the antithesis of dependency. Many people thought that they might become dependent in the future, and a common desire was for continued good health; "as long as you have your health, you are alright". Of all the possible aspects of dependency, the most feared was that of senility, with many participants saying that death was infinitely preferable. Participants also saw independence in a second way, as the capacity for self-direction. In this sense independence is having control over one's life and having the freedom to choose what to do:

"I don't want people to tell me what I can do and what I can't do. You like to do the things that you want to do, how you want, and where you want. It's your life isn't it"?

This conceptualization of independence focuses on the locus of power over one's life. The value placed on self-direction arises from an awareness that under certain circumstances, such as disability, there is the possibility that this power will be eroded through the

unwelcome intrusion of others. The "loss of independence" in this sense is perhaps of greater personal significance than the actual material condition of dependency. Certainly, current manifestoes for independent living for the disabled argue that it is ". . . more important for us to have full control over our lives than over our bodies (Zola, 1983, 58). This leads on to a third meaning of independence, where it is conceived as not having to feel obligated towards anyone:

"I like to be independent. I don't want to be beholden to any man. We don't owe a penny between us. It is one of our principles. Nobody likes to sort of beg for anything, waiting for handouts all the time".

There is clearly a great deal of pride behind this last statement. The implication is that without independence, one must rely on others for help. This in itself is being dependent, but it also involves a loss of honour and self respect. One is symbolically subjugated to the benefactor, constrained by a debt of gratitude.

The value placed on being independent, whatever its precise usage, is undeniable and characterized most of the participants in the study. However, it is necessary

to critically examine this attitude. One initial observation is that participants' conceptualizations of independence were very much in terms of individualism, such as doing things for oneself, or self-direction. Yet hardly anyone can be seen as fully independent: we all rely on others to a greater or lesser extent; no-one is totally in control of their lives; and very few of us can ever have avoided a feeling of debt towards some benefactor. Moreover, most people would not desire the social isolation that would accompany this level of "independence". So why are such individualistic terms used? Possible answers to this question can be found in those cases where a more ambivalent attitude was expressed, where the inherent interdependency of human life was accepted. Consider the following statement:

"It's nice to have a neighbour that you can depend on. We all like a bit of help at times. But there are people who elaborate on it. We are not standoffish by a long way, but we do like to show a little independence. It's nice to have help though when you are in trouble" (72).

This man is suggesting that a certain level of reliance on others is both necessary and appreciated. He is grateful that he can rely on neighbours when needed, implying a network of interdependence within his locality. However, he draws a line at some indistinct



point between a "bit of help" and undue reliance. It is also pertinent that the expression "to show a little independence" is used. This implies a distinction between the actuality of relying on other people, and the symbolic quality of independence. The person concerned accepts the help from others, while at the same time maintaining a level of social separation. A similar sentiment was expressed by another participant:

"To tell the truth, I was an awful fellow for being independent, but it's a fools game. As you get on a bit, you are glad of help now and again. It proves to you that you can be too independent. You are looking for a bit of help and company when you are older" (74).

Again there is a realisation that we are all dependent on others to some extent. For this man, the realisation came about when he had a leg amputated and he came to rely on his landlady to keep an eye on him and to do his errands. He suggests that an overemphasis on independence is a "fool's game" and, clearly, he has come to terms with a situation that would have been unacceptable to him previously. Another participant offers an illuminating perspective on this issue:

"Older people like to be independent. Partly, its that older people don't want to think that they are

dependent on anybody else and partly because they are and don't want to admit it. It's a bit of an illusion" (32).

This participant appreciates the distinction between independence as a state and as an ideal. He recognises that older people will value and proclaim their independence, despite the fact that they may be dependent on others in actuality. The cultural emphasis on individualism and "independence" is an important factor behind this attitude. However, the elderly seem to be particularly concerned with their independence. The last quote is again illuminating on this issue. The link between dependency and old age is made strongly. The implication is that in the face of actual or potential dependency, then the older individual places greater value on being independent, even to the extent of self-delusion. Being independent is something that is taken for granted when one is independent, and is only brought into consciousness in the context of its loss.

#### INDEPENDENCE AND THE HOME.

The main focus of this chapter is the role of the home environment in affording independence in later life.

During the interviews it became clear that participant's homes played an important part in maintaining independence both symbolically and instrumentally. It is difficult to measure objectively the strength of feeling on this issue, but only one person said that their home definitely did not help to keep them independent and most were insistent that it was helpful. Participants were asked to expand on their views and to explain exactly what they felt on this issue. A content analysis of the answers produced a set of meaning categories for the home-independence relationship (Table 6. 1).

The eight categories are similar to the three modes of independence described in the last section. For example, the categories of "doing what you want" and "nobody tells you what to do" correspond to the mode of "self-direction". Two categories are not readily associated with the earlier conceptualisation of independence. These are "stability and protection" and "contentedness". These would seem to have more in common with Bachelard's (1969) notion of the home as a protective shell. However, from the evidence of the other six categories, it seems that participants' homes contribute to all three modes of independence.

The categories in Table 6. 1 also point to a further dimension of the experience of independence. In



Table 6.1 Categories of the Home-Independence Relationship.

Category	No. of people using category
1. You do things for yourself	13
2. Home as a symbol of independence	11
3. Contented at home	9
4. Can do what you want here	7
5. Not beholden to anybody	5
6. Stability and protection	5
7. You don't depend on anybody else	4
8. Nobody tells you what to do here	4

(n=34, responses can be assigned to more than one category)

Table 6.2 Structure of the Home-Independence Relationship.

Mode of independence	Self/others orientation	Role of home
Not dependent	Self	Do things for yourself
	Others	Not depending on anybody
Self-direction	Self	Can do what you want
	Others	Nobody tells you what to do
Obligation	Self	Symbolic of independence
	Others	Not beholden to anybody

the first instance, three modes of independence were defined, but within this it is possible to identify a distinct orientation between self and others. This allows the construction of a more detailed model of the independence-home relationship (Table 6. 2).

To understand independence, one must consider two facets of experience: mode and orientation. For example the mode of self-direction can be defined in two ways. It is being able to do what you want to do; that is the self-orientation. Alternatively, it is being free from others telling you what to do; that is the others-orientation. The self-others duality is also clear in respect to "not being dependent". In one sense, this is a matter of doing things for yourself, while in another it is not relying on others to do things for you.

The operation of the self-others facet is least clear in respect to "not feeling obligated". The others orientation of "not beholden to anybody" is clear, but the self orientation of "symbolic of independence" is not self-explanatory and needs clarification. "Symbolic of independence" has been used to describe such issues as the achievement of ambition and the symbolism of owning a house. These are not directly oriented towards "others", but reflect the idea of identity and the preservation of personal integrity. In this sense, the



home represents the independent self.

It is interesting that the distinction between self and others became apparent in the responses to questions on the role of the home in promoting independence. The home can be understood as a mediator between self and others. It is the place of the self, while outside is the more general place of others. The home provides the physical demarcation between self and others, along with the authority to exclude others from the home domain.

This basic affordance of the home can be seen as an important material basis for all modes of independence in later life. At the level of physical independence, one of the demands of living at home is the ability to look after yourself, as external help is not always available. The interviews suggested that even seriously disabled people are usually able to adjust to their disability and can successfully maintain an independent lifestyle at home. At the level of self-direction, the legitimate authority to control who has access to the home domain (and consequently the self) is fundamental to privacy. The physical barrier of the home prevents the intrusion of others, and the dweller is free to do what they want, hidden from the gaze of others. In symbolic terms the home is of prime importance to elderly people. Many participants said that their home was "all I have left", or that it is "an achievement, it

is what we've worked for". The home is a material expression of the individual, reinforcing a sense of identity and defining who you are to others.

The importance placed by participants on the role of the home suggests that independence in later life cannot be fully understood without reference to the home environment. Without the physical barrier between self and others, independence in any mode may be difficult to sustain. Also, with the increasing emphasis placed on being "independent" by people as they get older, it is likely that they will become increasingly aware of the role of their home as the basis of much of that independence.

#### INDEPENDENCE AND OTHER LIVING ARRANGEMENTS.

A person's home can play an important part in affording feelings of independence. A number of the participants contrasted this with other living arrangements that are common amongst older people. In particular, old people's homes and hospitals were seen as places that undermined independence. This is an important issue for the understanding of home experience in later life. Many participants were aware that increasing frailty may involve having to move to a more supportive environment, and attitudes towards these alternatives has

implications for how older people appreciate their present homes. To explore this issue, participants were asked to give examples of the sorts of living arrangements that are available specifically for the elderly, and to evaluate these according to whether these would be suitable for them if they had to move, and whether they would feel "at home" in these places. The responses are summarized in Table 6.3.

i. Institutions.

Table 6.3 indicates that institutional care is the most frequently mentioned type of living arrangement, while also being very unpopular. The possibility of life in some form of institution was a source of dread for many of the participants. Old people's homes are seen as the "end of the line", places for "clapped-out geriatrics". The desire for independence is a factor in shaping these attitudes. Institutions are seen as offering little privacy or scope for self-direction, while residents are seen as being "just one of a crowd", "sitting in rows staring into space". For example:

"Old folks homes- I wouldn't have them except for extremely frail and fragile people. Staff treat old people as mentally afflicted. They have things done just so. At one place I know, the old people couldn't go into the beautiful grounds, because



Table 6.3 Types of Accommodation:  
Awareness and Preference.

Accommodation	Mentioned	Suit- able	Neither	Not suit
Living with relatives.				
Children	8	2	2	4
Sister/brother	1	-	-	1
Institutions.				
Geriatric hospital	3	-	-	3
Old people's home	27	2	2	23
Alternative housing.				
Sheltered accomm	26	12	11	3
Old person's flat	12	1	4	7
Old person's bungalow	14	10	4	-
Support in present home.				
Home help	4	-	-	4
Help from friend/family	1	-	-	1

their outdoor clothing was kept upstairs. You can't do the things that you want to do. It's like a hospital, not a home. They take away a lot of liberty. It's my dread to go into a home. I would think of suicide if I had to. Old folks homes are not homes, they are home with a capital 'H'. Old people should be able to remain in their own homes, and services should be provided there. It's better for the individual like that and not in a home" (14).

Many of the participants talked about old people's homes in these terms, and certainly any institution seemed to be attributed with the worst characteristics. Unfortunately, such an image is likely to persist, notwithstanding efforts to improve institutional living arrangements. In the face of this image, it is not surprising that participants preferred their own homes. But it is interesting to consider the case of Mr Forster (19), an eighty year old widower who has considered going into a home:

"My home means a lot to me, you still have your independence. You're still free to do as you like. But it's a quiet life altogether here. Nobody comes to visit me. I've got a daughter who never comes to see me. It's deadly silent here. Most of the time I just sit here watching the clock". If I

had to move, I suppose it would be into a home...I don't fancy it really (moving to an old people's home). You get more company, but you always get an awkward customer, someone who never stops talking. You wouldn't have the privacy. You have your own room, but you can't do what you like".

In Mr Forster's case, home meant independence, but it was also a place of loneliness. An old people's home would mean more company, but less freedom, and this factor seemed to be the prime consideration for Mr Forster.

#### ii. Living with relatives.

This option was generally not appealing, even amongst those who had been invited to live with children, or who had done so for a time already. In many cases, living with relatives would mean a move away from the locality. This could sometimes involve a move as far as the south of England or even abroad. Such moves are not always attractive given the possible disruption of lifestyles, loss of friends and familiar places (see Chapter 9). But perhaps a more significant issue is related to the idea of independence. To live with someone else, even one's own children, can be seen as a loss of independence. An interesting case is that of Robert



(56):

"What I mean by home is that I can please myself in it, ninety per cent of the time at least I mean. You can do what you want in your own place. You have to think about other people in other places and you are never sure that you are upsetting them. Your home is a place where you can relax and you don't have to worry and you just get on with things. After I had my stroke, I went down to Essex to live with the eldest lad and his family. I couldn't stand it. I couldn't do what I wanted. You didn't know whether you were doing right when you did things".

The main concern of Robert was the loss of personal freedom. However, this was not just a matter of self-interest. He had been very sensitive to how much he might have been impinging on his family's privacy. A consistently occurring objection to living with relatives or children is that it would be an unfair imposition on them:

"I wouldn't like to go into one of these homes, but I prefer that to going in with my own people. It's not right to impose yourself on a daughter and husband. They have their own families and I wouldn't like to feel I had to inflict myself on

them, even though they are very good" (18).

This person's concern coincides with the idea of independence in terms of obligation. In this sense it is not so much a case of "not being beholden", but is rather a feeling of restricting the independence of others by your presence in their home. Children are seen as "having their own lives to lead", and that there should be no moral obligation upon them to look after elderly relatives. Living with relatives is thus perceived as a loss of independence for all concerned.

### iii. Support in the present home.

A number of participants suggested that if they became physically frail, they could go on living in their present homes given external support. Indeed, about a third of the participants complained of some form of physical disability, with about half of these being severely disabled. For most of these people, dependency amounted to friends or children doing some of their cleaning and shopping. Of the 21 people who had some disability, only 11 had home helps. Some people felt that they would not like to have a home help, even though they were unable to do some of their household work themselves. For example, Mrs Whickham (52) who has arthritis and angina:

"We can manage. In our own time. You can tell people's living conditions from the outside of the house. But you get a lot of old folks who don't have the inclination or strength. The daughter does the washing and shopping, but we don't have a home help. We could do with a home help, but we're not bothered. We're too independent".

In Mrs Whickham's case, relying on a home help represented a loss of independence, whereas receiving help from her daughter did not. This suggests that informal help from family or friends is less symbolic of dependence than formal care. To Mrs Whickham, a home help would be an intrusion upon the privacy of the home and would be an open admittance of her failing capability to do things for herself. Although her home and garden were increasingly becoming a burden, it was something that had to be preserved. To lose her home, or to admit formal help, was to lose independence. Her home was both a means towards, and a symbol, of her continued independence.

#### iv. Housing specifically for the elderly.

When asked about other available living arrangements, most participants mentioned old people's homes or



housing schemes specifically for the elderly. Of this latter group, people were usually aware of a specific scheme in their neighbourhood. If faced with the necessity of moving, most people said that this sort of accommodation would be most suitable, offering an independent lifestyle, as opposed to living in a residential home. Moreover, 18 of the people who expressed this preference felt that they would feel at home there sooner or later. To these people, the main issue at stake was their independence: a flat or a sheltered place is still seen as "your own place". A number of people did think that even these arrangements would be unsuitable. This was mostly because they were attached to their present homes and thought that they would never feel at home anywhere else. However, some of these people also felt that they would be less independent in one of these places. Wardens and other old people living in close proximity were sometimes seen as "busibodies". For these people, independence was only possible in their own place: "I'd rather be on my own, in my own house, not with other people around all the time".

In general, places that were perceived to offer high levels of independence, such as bungalows or sheltered housing were preferred to places that were seen as offering little scope in this respect. But it

is interesting to note that the conceptualization of independence (ie. the mode as defined earlier) depends on the context in which it is being used. In the discussion of living in old people's homes, the main concern was perceived lack of freedom and self-direction in those places. In the case of living with relatives, independence was expressed as an unwillingness to be a burden. For those people who are still living in their own homes, the idea of formal domiciliary care signifies a loss of independence in terms of physical dependency on other people to do things for you.

Whatever the specific definition, people's views of these other settings served to highlight for them the "independence" afforded by their own homes. It is important to stress the distinction between the symbolic and actual qualities of the various living arrangements. For example, the mode of "self-direction" involves being able to do what you want, and being free from others telling you what to do. The home is seen to offer maximum scope for self-direction, but what does this freedom of choice actually allow to the individual, and how is it exploited? Several participants had a negative image of institutions as places where old people sit around aimlessly staring into space. But consider the following statement:

I don't do much. I sit about too much. This is

the only trouble when you get older. It is just a case of doing your errands and getting the paper. I just sit about most of the time. That's the trouble. I go out if I want something. I should go out and do something. It gets very easy just sitting. But a lot of old people go out or watch TV 'just to put the time in'. I don't need TV to put the time in. I can sit here and watch the ornaments on the mantelpiece and be happy. It's silly doing things just to pass the time".

This man was not unique, nor was he depressed or lonely. But it is striking that the independence offered to him by living at home is the freedom to do exactly what participants suggested was characteristic of behaviour in old people's homes. One can view this as self-contradictory, but it may be better to see it as highlighting the distinction between how one lives and how one interprets that living. The modes of independence defined earlier are construed very much in behavioural term, such as being able to do what you want. But actually being independent in "objective" terms, however one defines the concept, seems to be less important than the subjective feeling of independence.

#### THE MATERIAL BASIS OF INDEPENDENCE.



The discussion so far has emphasised the symbolic qualities of independence in later life. However, it would be unwise to view independence simply as an ideal that may bear little relation to objective "reality". Although independence is a quality of experience that derives from a person's interpretation of their situation, this interpretation is grounded in the material circumstances of the individual. For instance, discussions with disabled participants suggested that living at home, by its very nature, contributes directly to the promotion of self-reliance in later life, as physical abilities begin to decline. This is well illustrated by the case of Robert (56), a widower living alone, who is semi-paralysed after a stroke ten years ago:

"The stairs are the best thing in the world for me-exercise. It's the finest exercise in the world as far as I'm concerned. I never let the stairs worry me. You never get from where you are if you don't try and get up. Determination is the finest thing in the world. If you get tired half way up, just bend down and put your hand on the step and have a rest".

This is perhaps a unique perspective on the problem of coping with stairs. Nevertheless, the principle is

general: the use of impaired faculties and physical exercise are important in maintaining physical capability and health in later life (Ostrow, 1980, 1983). In many cases, simply to keep moving is an essential aspect of staying physically independent. DeVries (1979) suggests that physiological deterioration may occur due to an increasingly sedentary lifestyle that is commonly associated with advancing age. The demands of living at home make some level of physical activity a necessity. This should be compared to "supportive" environments, such as residential homes, where activity often has to be consciously promoted.

This is not just an instrumental matter. There is evidence that good health and physical activity may promote mental well-being (Sidney and Shepherd, 1976; Zandra and Hempel, 1984). For example, exercise in old age may contribute to an improved self-concept and feelings of control, self-confidence, and mastery over the environment (Pirri and Templar 1985). In the case of Robert, doing things for himself brings with it a sense of achievement and sustains a belief in his own physical capabilities. Yet for all his desire for independence, he was happy to accept help in those areas where he felt he needed it. Living at home showed him what he could not do as well as what he could do. However, at the symbolic level, Robert's knowledge that he was at least able to do most things himself was

important in maintaining his self-esteem:

"After the stroke, I couldn't do much for myself for the first six months, but I was determined I was going to do something. I say you don't get very far sitting around moping or you'll be in the box. If you just sit around relying on everybody, you just deteriorate. I'm not trying to boast, but it's the attitude that everybody should take".

Robert is a man of exceptional determination and sense of independence, but his attitude and situation was mirrored by many of the participants. Although living at home presented problems to some of them, they were problems to be overcome and in doing so, achieving independence both symbolically and instrumentally.

VIOLET.

So far a number of insights have been gained into the relationship between independence and the home environment. However, the value of the research is whether it can be used as a framework for understanding individual experience. In this section the case of Violet Redman is discussed from this perspective. The author knew Violet, but was unable to talk with her in



depth before she died. However, her case is interesting and the details have been reconstructed from the accounts of close relatives of Violet's.

Violet was in her early 80's when she was diagnosed as having cancer and she was only expected to live for a couple of months. She did not ask to be moved away from her home, but her three daughters felt that this was in her own best interests. Her daughters all had family and work commitments and, as Violet lived some distance away from two of them, it would be more convenient for them to have their mother living with them. Violet kept some sentimental things, but she disposed of all her furniture amongst relatives and she gave up the council house in which she had lived for 30 years.

Violet lived for nearly a year. She was very ill during this time and could do little for herself. She had to be helped with washing and going to the toilet. She could not really be moved around between daughters and the responsibility for looking after her fell mainly on Margaret, her eldest daughter. Violet had a room to herself, but unfortunately one of the grandchildren had to sleep on a settee. Although Margaret and her husband Bob were prepared to look after Violet, the situation resulted in a good deal of stress for all concerned. Violet often disagreed with Margaret's husband over what would be on television. On one occasion, while Violet

was watching a film in the early evening, Bob came in from work and switched over for the news without asking. Although this was a fairly insignificant event in itself, it was one amongst many.

This last episode was the last straw for Violet. She felt she was unwelcome in the house and made up her mind to move out. She knew that this was possible, as there were old people's bungalows available near where she had lived before. At first, everybody concerned went along with this idea just to placate her, as she had not been resting properly. She seemed to benefit from planning for the new place, and it may have diverted her mind from the continual pain she was in from her illness. When a bungalow became free, she moved in.

Violet liked her new place. She said it was homely. She liked the quietness and atmosphere of the place. She liked her new lamp and curtains and she could see out of the large front window into the street. She was very proud of having her own place again and would get her daughter to show visitors around even though there were only three rooms. Violet died at home about a month later.

Violet's story shows that one cannot understand independence without relating it to both the individual

concerned and the situations they find themselves in. Violet had always valued her independence. Moreover, she was a strong-willed and formidable personality in many respects. Her eventual reaction to moving from her home is hardly surprising. Living at her daughter's house seemed to be very frustrating for her. Although she was very frail, she wanted to do things for herself. But in the context of her daughter's home, Violet's role was simply to sit and be looked after. A further cause of her dissatisfaction with living with relatives was the friction between Violet and the others in both the houses in which she stayed. The effects were cumulative. Violet was unhappy that she could no longer do exactly as she pleased, while the actions of others, even though they were children and grandchildren, prayed upon Violet's peace of mind. Justly or unjustly, Violet felt that she was an unwelcome resident in her children's houses. She could not feel at home in a place where she felt she was unwelcome.

But what did Violet achieve by moving into the bungalow? She still could do virtually nothing for herself and one of her daughters had to be constantly with her, an even greater trouble than before. One can possibly understand Violet's new home as an expression of her individuality. She had not been asked if she wanted to leave her original house; it had been expected of her and she had complied. She had been expected



to behave in a certain way in her daughters' houses. Despite her illness, Violet was not prepared to end her life in this passive way. Indeed she was more concerned with the future than reminiscing. Before she moved to the bungalow, she derived a lot of pleasure from thinking about it and planning for her life there.

It should be remembered that Violet was terminally ill, had not been expected to live for more than a few more weeks, and was unable to look after herself. The idea that she should be concerned with the future and attempt to establish a new direction in her life seems incongruent with the "common sense" image of old people. One could say that for older people, the past plays an important role because the present and future holds little for them. But nothing about such an orientation is inevitable. They are people's attempts to make sense of their situations and to define a meaningful existence within given circumstances. But in the case of Violet, the opportunity to shape her own future was accepted and exploited. Whatever her physical condition and whatever other people thought of her, she was still Violet. Her new home showed this to other people, while serving to bolster her own feelings and desire for independence. The bungalow was Violet's place. It was her home, not somebody else's, the place where she could feel independent.

## CONCLUSION.

The present chapter has focused on the relationship between ageing and independence and the contribution of the home in affording independence in later life. At this point it is useful to summarize the main emerging themes.

### Ageing and independence.

The analysis of participants' definitions of the term, showed that "independence" is a complex concept that conveys a number of meanings: not being dependent; self-direction; and feelings of obligation. In natural discourse, the specific meaning of "independence" depends on the context in which the term is being used. For example, when participants talked about old people's homes, the main concern was with loss of "self-direction", while the prospect of living with relatives involved the loss of independence in terms of "obligation".

At one level, it is possible to outline fairly objective measures of independence/dependency. These measures are used as indicators of aggregate need for

support services. At the level of the individual, however, one is concerned with the subjective experience of independence. This is more difficult to evaluate as a person can feel independent even if they exhibit a high degree of dependence on objective criteria. Thus, it is necessary to see independence in symbolic terms, rather than as an objective state.

Independence is an important value amongst older people, But why is this? How does it become so? Is it perceived differently in later life?. One can suggest that in the face of its loss, independence can no longer be taken for granted as in earlier years, The possibility of losing one's independence, whatever its definition, shows the person just how important independence is to them.

#### Home and independence.

Although home and independence are components of everyday life, they are given significance in individual terms only because they are contextualized within the person's whole life experience. In particular, the individual's desires, objectives and expectations of the future construct a changing set of cognitions within which we orientate our day to day experiences. Thus, the ways in which a place facilitates or obstructs a



person's aims has direct implications for the experience of that place as home. Being independent is not just a matter of feeling independent, as there must be some basis of independence in actuality. Although independence is a highly symbolic and subjective experience, the home provides a necessary material context for being independent, which is itself an essential component of home experience in later life. The home is not simply a house, but a meaningful context for human action. The home affords independence in all its modes by providing a physical boundary between the individual and others, and by defining a space that is uniquely the domain of the individual.

The significance of the home also depends on the ageing individual. Many participants were aware of the possibility of losing their independence, and desire to remain independent may be a prime consideration, bringing into the foreground the role of the home. The home becomes the place where independence can be best preserved, and as such becomes a focus of concern. As independence becomes personally more significant, so does the value that an older person places on their home as a material basis of independence.

The evaluation of different types of living arrangements for the elderly illustrates this point. For example, attitudes towards old people's homes were

generally negative. A move to a home is not just a loss of physical independence, but is also seen as a loss of control and self. For those people who had some form of disability, the prospect could amount to "dread". In an illuminating study of older people faced with the prospect of moving from apartments to a nursing home, Morgan (1983) described the coping strategies that people use and the lengths they will go to avoid this move. For example, people would try to hide physical problems from medical authorities. The relative independence offered by an apartment was invariably worth physical suffering and the possibility of premature death. A shorter, but more fulfilling life was preferred to the "social death" (Kalish, 1966) implied by admission to the nursing home.

#### Ageing and home.

It is argued here that one of the central transactions between a person and their home is "independence". Independence is a function of both the individual's perceptions and the material affordances of a place. It has already been stressed that despite the subjective and symbolic nature of independence, it would be wrong to simply talk in ideal terms. How a person perceives and values independence is structured by the affordances of the material world.

From this perspective, it is possible to understand the growing significance of the home in terms of the transaction "independence", which links together the ageing person's awareness of the life changes that are common in later years, and the home as a means of negotiating these changes. A person's lifestyle and how they actually use their home may change considerably. The home is a flexible thing in these instrumental terms, but is a constant factor symbolically. The home remains a link with the past in that it suggests that one is still able to do the things that one has always done. The home also allows one to maintain control over oneself, to remain "true" to oneself. Finally, the home is symbolic of the values that one has always had. Ultimately, it is these symbolic qualities that are of greatest significance to the individual.

It is possible to link independence to the notion of "identity". At one level the body is significant of absolute individuality, while at other levels the individual becomes subsumed within group identities, such as race or nation. This is not to say that the concept of independence is equivalent to concepts of "identity" or "self". To construe independence as an abstract phenomenon would be wrong, as behavioural aspects, such as "being able to do what you want", are components of people's understanding of independence.



Independence is something that is directly experienced and is grounded in the material world. In experiential terms, "independence" is a more fundamental everyday concept of "identity" that locates identity as identity-in-the-world, or being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962; Starr, 1983).

The home plays an important <sup>role in</sup> framing the experience of independence and identity-in-the-world, through the affordance of control. The home is a symbol of the individual, both as an expression of identity to others, and as a personal confirmation of the "I" as distinct from "others". In a social context, old age is seen as a time of deterioration, loss of status and increased dependency. Symbolically, a person's home is a denial of this, afforded by the legitimate control that a person retains within the home domain.

## Chapter 7

ATTACHMENT TO HOME.

## INTRODUCTION.

Attachment to home has been used to explain why many older people simply wish to stay put. In the discussion of the concept of home in Chapter 4, a number of issues seemed to contribute to this personal dimension of home experience. For example, home is often valued because of the memories that are associated with it, together with feelings of familiarity and belongingness. For many older people, home is not just a general concept, but is related to the specific house that they live in, to the extent that to move away is almost unthinkable.

The analysis of attachment to home in old age involved two approaches. Firstly, a general understanding was gained through the content analysis of participants' responses to questions on how they felt about staying put in their present homes. The interviews explored the following issues:

i. To what extent have people considered moving from their homes?

ii. What are the reasons behind wanting to stay put or move?

iii. What would it mean if an older person had to



move for some reason?

iv. To what do people attribute the tendency to stay put amongst older people?

The rest of this chapter is devoted to the content analysis, which produced several consistent themes underlying attachment to home in old age. In a second approach to the problem, these emergent themes were explored in greater detail, and provide the subjects for subsequent chapters in the thesis.

#### HAVE PEOPLE CONSIDERED MOVING?

The first issue to be examined is whether people have considered, or felt the need to move from their present homes and to explore the possible factors behind these orientations. People were asked the question: "Have you ever thought about moving from your present home?" The responses are summarized in Table 7.1.

Half the respondents said that they had not thought about moving from their homes. The term "not thought about" can include people who have genuinely never considered the possibility, but also includes those people who have dismissed the idea of moving as an

Table 7.1. Have people considered moving?

No	Not really	Considered	Attempted	Total
23	11	9	4	47

unacceptable or unwanted possibility. A further quarter of the respondents said that they had not really considered a move. These people may have had the desire or need to move, but the chance of moving had never been realistic or particularly attractive. Nine out of the 47 respondents said that they had considered a move. These are people for whom moving may be, or may have been, a distinct possibility, but which is not a realistic option for one reason or another.

Only four respondents said that they were actually trying to move from their present home. Two of these were men who felt that they could no longer cope with living in their present homes and had applied for sheltered housing. Another man had applied for a council house transfer to another area. Finally, one woman had asked for a different council flat, as she was dissatisfied with her present place due to high heating costs and infestation by cockroaches. Two of these people said there was no chance that they would get a move, and the only realistic possibility of a move was

for one of the applicants to enter a sheltered housing scheme.

#### REASONS FOR NOT MOVING.

The overall response is that only a few people are actually involved in trying to move from their present house. One of the striking things from asking people about moving was that even those who had considered the possibility were very vague about their intentions or motivations. It would seem that the idea of moving is often simply a response to the uncertainties or changes that tend to occur in later life. For example, some people said that they had had the chance of moving and had thought about it, but had decided not to move. At this point it is useful to examine the reasons given for why people do not want to move, or have been unable to do so. These reasons are summarized in Table 7.2.

i. Upheaval. Some people felt that the actual process of moving from one place to another would be something that they could not face. For example:

"My daughter wanted us to go to one of those places in Old Benwell. But it would be too much upset for us now. I objected. I wouldn't go. I think the



Table 7.2. Reasons for not moving.

Category	Reason	No. of mentions
Upheaval	Too much upheaval	3
	Couldn't cope with the moving	3
	Wouldn't like the change	1
Fear of unknown	Could have bad neighbours in new place	3
	New place could be worse	1
Expense	Can't afford to move	7
Final home	This is my last refuge	3
	On your way out if you move	2
	Not now	2
	Not at my age	5
	You don't know how much time you've got left	
	When they take me out of here it will be in a box.	2
No reason to move	Move for what?	2
	This place is as good as anywhere	2
No suitable alternative	Nothing appropriate	4
	Didn't like places I looked at	2
Attractions of present home	Family nearby	1
	Fond of home	3
	Happy here	2
	Good neighbours here	3
(n=43. People can be assigned to more than one cat.)		

move would be the finish of us".

ii. Fear of unknown. A move to a new place would involve a degree of uncertainty. Familiarity with one's present locale is balanced against the unfamiliarity of the unknown. In particular, people were worried that if they moved they may find themselves living next door to "bad" neighbours, a situation that they would have no control over:

"Once or twice we have thought about moving, but not really. It depends on how you feel. Making new friends and neighbours and that would be a problem. You don't know what they are like. You could move and find that the neighbours don't want to bother with you. Whereas here, they are always ready to help you when you are ill".

iii. Expense. Seven people said that they would not be able move because of the expense involved. All but one of these were people who owned their own homes, where the actual cost of buying, selling and removing would be prohibitive. However, this "barrier" should be seen in the light of other issues. For example, most of the people lived in places that were at the cheaper end of the housing market. Most notably, houses in the Scotswood area are almost unsaleable. Thus, the money gained from selling their house would not allow people

to buy anything that they saw as better. Interestingly, all four of the people who were seeking a move lived in rented (private or council) housing, that the expense obstacle is less significant for this group.

iv. Attractions of the present home. People said that they would not like to leave their present home for a number of reasons. Some people valued having good neighbours or their family nearby, who they could depend on in times of need. As well as this instrumental orientation, the emotional ties to home were also given as reasons. People said that they were fond of their homes, that they had been, and still were, very happy there.

v. No suitable alternative. For a move to be a realistic proposition, a person must be aware of suitable alternatives to their present home. Certainly, some people had been through the process of examining the possibilities and had found nothing that was suitable. For example:

"I don't think we will be shifting now. We went to see a sheltered home once. The social worker suggested it; Allandale Court in Walker. It just wasn't home. The rooms were too small. We were greeted with 'we can't help you at all'. We need help. We have a home help and our son and daughter



help us out".

vi. No reason to move. Some people simply said that there was no point in moving and that they had not considered moving. This attitude can be a function of how they valued their present homes, for example "its as good as anywhere". Alternatively, moving elsewhere would not be justified by any apparent benefits or necessity:

"Moving would create too much upheaval at my time of life. I would have to find a new place and settle in and I would have to get all my things moved. All this and for what? just a few years in a new house. The rest of the place could tumble down now. I am set here now".

vii. Final home. The most significant response to the question about moving, was that people often felt that their present home was their final home. This is perhaps the most interesting response from a gerontological point of view and involves a number of motivations and attitudes that are common in later life. A major factor is that people are aware that they are near to the end of their lives. This is a fact that colours people's home experiences and attitudes to moving. Some people feel that they are too old to move even if they had the opportunity: "I have given it

(moving) a thought, but its nothing serious. I'm 79 now. You don't know how much time you have left". For some people, the move away from home is the beginning of the end:

"We thought about moving, but not now. We were going to put our names on a list for houses in Benwell Village. But we decided not to. We had lots of furniture, sentimental reasons. You move and you shift, and when you are older you are on the way out when you do that. You get the feeling you're not going to last long. There is no fear of us moving now".

This symbolic quality of home is also reflected in more defiant language: "If they take me out of here it will be in a box"; or "The only time they will move me is when I go up the cemetery. No fear of me moving". Underlying this is a desire or belief that this is one's last place.

#### THE PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MOVING.

The striking feature of the housing situation of older people is the very small number of people who have considered moving; most have no wish to move, while

others are unable to move for one reason or another. In this section, the personal significance of the home to the participants was examined by asking the question: "What would it mean to you if you had to move for some reason?" Out of 47 participants, 11 said that they wouldn't mind moving, leaving 36 people (approximately threequarters) who said that they did not want to move. The responses are examined separately for these two groups. In Table 7.3. the responses of the people who would not like to move are presented.

#### People Who Did Not Want To Move.

The overwhelming majority of people said that they did not want to move. Many of the reasons they gave mirror those outlined in the last section in response to the question on whether they had considered moving. For example, a number of participants said that they would not like the upheaval associated with moving, while some people said that there was no suitable alternative and no reason to move. Moreover, the attractions of the present home in terms of the proximity of friends, neighbours and familyt remains a significant issue. The other categories deserve further comment.

i. Symbolic of dependency. The analysis in the last section suggested that many older people perceive their



Table 7.3. People who would not like to move.

Category	Observation	No. of mentions
Upheaval	Upheaval	8
	Have to settle down all over	1
	Couldn't cope with move	3
	Too old to move now	1
	Have to find new friends/neighbours	1
Miss house	Wouldn't be same if I moved	2
	Memories	7
	Tear up roots	4
	I'm never alone here	2
	It would be like leaving husband	1
	Nothing else to live for	1
	Like area	2
	Lived here a long time	3
	Born here	1
Symbol of dependency	Wouldn't like to be dependent on my daughter	2
	Wouldn't like to go in a home	1
	You would feel that you wouldn't last long	3
Nothing else Suitable	This place is as good as any	1
	No other place I want to go	2
	Where would I get a place as good?	1
Social/family ties	Wouldn't like to leave friends	2
	Wouldn't like to leave family	2
Positive aspects	Depends on where you are going to	4
	I would get used to it	5
	You'd have to make the best of it	3
	Would like a home on the level	3

present homes as their "final home". Developing this idea, the act of moving is often necessitated by increasing frailty, and moving can be symbolic of dependency. People would be unhappy about having to be dependent on their children for support, while the possibility of having to go into a home is not attractive.

ii. Miss the house. This is perhaps the most significant issue to arise from people's responses and, obviously, attachment to one's home is a potent force in respect to the participants' home experience. The broad category defined here may not convey the wealth of personal meanings that people associate with their home. It is possible to suggest further ways at looking at the issue. Firstly, the idea of rootedness seems important. Living in a place or an area for a long time brings about an almost unbreakable attachment.

"I would think I was leaving part of my life behind. The memories, good and bad of what has happened. It wouldn't be the same if I moved. As you get older, you find that you've been in the house for so long you don't want to leave it. I can't explain it. It's part of you, it's part of your life".

Certainly, most of the people who are included in

this category had lived in their houses for many years. The average length of residence of this group was 35 years, with all except one person having lived in the same house for over 19 years. For these people, living away from their present homes is almost inconceivable. Their home is so much a part of the fabric of their lives, that many people use the term "rooted" or "tearing up my roots" as a metaphor for their home experience.

A further significant issue is that of memories. Although feeling "rooted" is not necessarily based on the associations of past events and home, memories are usually very significant. For some widowed people, the evocation of times past within the home is very strong:

"I wouldn't like to move away. I would miss the house. I would think I was leaving my husband behind. being here, I feel as if I am still near him. People say 'why don't you move?' I said 'I will never move from here'".

iii. Positive aspects. It is important not to overstress the personal significance of the relationship between an older person and their home. A number of people said that they would not like to move, but that a move is not necessarily a bad thing and may even have some benefits. Eight people said that if they had to



move for some reason, they would get used to, or make the best of, the situation. Other people said that how they would feel about the move would depend on the place they were going to, even though they were satisfied with their present home. Finally, some people mentioned benefits, such as living on the level, which might accrue from moving house.

#### People Who Would not Mind Moving.

The positive aspects of moving are reflected in the responses of people who said that they would not mind moving house (Table 7.4). Although the small number of people in this group means that the response categories are unlikely to be exhaustive, the main issues seem fairly clear.

i. Not attached. Some people said that they were not attached to their homes. This can be expressed as a trait of the person:

"I'm not sentimental. It wouldn't upset me too much if I had to go to a new place. I am not one for brick and mortar. You make your home in the new place. A house is just a building".

Alternatively, the absence of attachment to the

Table 7.4. People who would not mind moving.

Category	Observation	No. of Mentions
Not Attached	I'm not sentimental	2
	It wouldn't mean anything to leave here	1
	My house is just an artefact	1
Negative about present house	Flat is too expensive	1
	I don't know people around here now	2
Aspiring	I would like something better	1
	Depends on what you get	3
Has objective	Would like to move to sheltered housing	3
	Want to move to village near friend	1
Negative aspects	I would have to like new place	1
	I would miss this place	1
	I would miss friend	1

home can be attributed to the place: "Apart from the personal things in it, the house is just an artefact". This lady had lived at the present house for two years. She moved because she wanted to be near her family and she couldn't manage the last place. She admitted that she did not want to leave that place:

"I missed the last place. They never raised the rent the whole time I was there. It was a wrench to leave it. Leaving it meant leaving a much warmer community than I find here. I missed the house and the garden. The view was lovely, the garden was lovely. The rooms were bigger".

This case illustrates that attachment to home can be very much a matter of investment of meaning in the home, a process that tends to occur over a long period of time. Nevertheless, this should not be seen as a hard and fast rule; the 11 people who said that they wouldn't mind moving had lived in their homes for an average of 22 years. Equally, one should not assume that the significant meanings associated with home cannot be built up in a relatively short space of time.

ii. Negative about present house. Obviously, dissatisfaction with one's present house or living arrangements can be a spur to moving. Only three people expressed dissatisfaction with their present



home. One lady said that it was too expensive, while two people said that they felt that nowadays they were "strangers on the street".

iii. Aspiring. A number of people are classified as "aspiring", in that they would be happy to move if the place they were moving to was perceived as better than their present home:

"It just depends on where I was moving to. If it was somewhere worse, I would be right in the dumps. Naturally, you always want something better. The wife is always wanting to move into something better, like all women. If I got a chance of a bigger, nicer house, I would move".

iv. Moving is an objective. Although few older people are interested in, or involved in, moving, it would be wrong to suggest that all older people wish to remain where they are. Four people had specific objectives in mind when they suggested that they would like to move. Three people wanted to move to sheltered housing, while one man wanted to move to be near his friend.

v. Negative aspects. Although these people would not mind moving, this should not be seen as unconditional. On the one hand people would have to like the place that they were moving to, while there are always likely to be

regrets when one leaves a house or area.

#### OLDER PEOPLE AND STAYING PUT.

The analysis so far indicates that there are aspects of home experience that seem particularly associated with older people. Notably, memories, feelings of being "rooted" have emerged as significant issues. The apparent tendency to stay put and to be very attached to home among older people was further explored by asking the participants the more general question, "Many older people say that they will never leave their homes; what do you think about this?". Their answers are presented in Table 7.5.

Again, many of the meaning categories are similar to those already described in respect to the previous questions. However, the present question focused directly on the issue of ageing and home, and participants' responses provided deeper insights. The question also asked people to generalize, rather than to limit themselves to their own personal experiences. This was an attempt to examine the socially defined basis for interpreting home experience in later life.

i. Memories/contented. A common image is one of older

Table 7.5. Why older people stay put.

Category	Observation	No. of Mentions
Memories/ contented	Reminisce/dreamworld	2
	Fond memories	3
	Happy and settled	5
	Contented	3
Rooted	Lived there that long	8
	Attached	4
	Used to it/settled	8
	Feels right	2
	Your habitat	2
	Rooted	4
	It's part of you/your life	2
The individual	Depends on person	2
	Can't imagine why people feel like this	1
End of life	Too old- no time to settle down	1
	You hope you can enjoy it while you can	1
	Come to end of life	1
	Stay here till we die	2
	Ready for box if you move	1
Benefits of staying put	You know people around you	1
	No point in leaving	4
	Have it exactly how I like	1
	Have their knick knacks around them	1
	It's your ambition/achievement	1
Problems of Leaving	Have to leave friends	1
	Might not get on with new neighbours	1
	Couldn't get a good alternative	4
	Have to make new friends	2
	You couldn't get used to it	2
	Upheaval	5
	Couldn't share with anyone else	1
	Nowhere else to go	1
	Have to start all over again	1
		(n=36)



people being concerned with the past. Reminiscence and the memories of past events and people are seen to be a central aspect of old age. Within this image, old age and contentment are almost synonymous, with reminiscence and fantasy the key to this happy state:

"It is because they love to be in their home. It means that they are contented. They have their knick knacks and that and sit and look at their ornaments and think back. It must be the little things around them that makes them contented. If you live contentedly in a place you live in a little dreamworld. If they live by themselves they can remember all the things from their life".

This is an idealised vision of what it is like to be old. For example, reminiscence is not valued by some older people, while others find remembering a painful rather than pleasurable process (Coleman, 1986). Nevertheless, remembering the past cannot be denied as a significant aspect of later life, and it has been suggested that fantasy plays an increasingly important role in the ageing persons experiential world (Rowles, 1978). The role of the home is also significant in providing cues for remembering ("knick-knacks"), while also providing the place for remembering ("dreamworld"). The image presented in the above quote is strongly suggestive of Bachelard's (1964) notion of the home as a

place of reverie.

ii. Rooted. The idea of "rootedness" is perhaps the most extensively used explanation of why older people prefer to stay put. Implicit in this idea is that the older person is to some extent dependent on their home for their well being, or even survival. To be "uprooted" from one's habitat implies that the individual will not survive. Even fairly bland statements such as "settled" imply that the older person cannot be settled elsewhere. As suggested in the last section, these ties to home are seen to be related to the length of residence.

iii. End of life. As already shown, old age involves an awareness of the end of one's life. The belief that one has reached the last stage of life seems to be paralleled by a desire to stay put in the final home. The fact that "you could go at any moment", colours one's attitudes to traumatic and long-term actions such as moving.

iv. Attractions of present home. Surprisingly, the desire to stay put in old age is rarely interpreted in terms of the attractions of the home. "Rootedness" and "end of life" are not so much benefits as they are descriptions of the way things are.

v. Problems of leaving. These have already been

covered. Basically, there are three main problems: upheaval; not wishing to leave friends and having to make new connections; and the absence of suitable alternatives.

vi. The individual. A small number of people felt that they could not answer the question. One person emphasised the role of the individual in respect to attitudes towards home. Two other people said that, from their point of view, home was not their major concern, and they did not understand the attachment that seems to occur between the older person and the home. The point here is that only three people out of 36 did not concur with the original statement in the question, while the rest tacitly supported the view that older people are very attached to their homes, and offered explanations for this phenomenon. If one examines individual cases, then personal motives, attitudes and circumstances are always going to colour the individual's experience of home. However, the significance of the more general images uncovered by the present question is that they dimensions by which older people interpret the attachment to home in later life.

DIMENSIONS OF STAYING PUT.



Although many issues have been highlighted by the analysis so far in this chapter, there are a number of consistent themes that may provide the key to understanding the often close relationship between the older person and their home. These are:

i. Firstly, older people often have a great deal of emotional "investment" in their homes. In particular, many participants stressed the memories that are associated with home.

ii. Secondly, many older people feel that they are approaching the end of their lives. The imminence of death colours people's feelings and motivations, both to life in general and, more specifically, to their homes.

iii. Thirdly, familiarity with the house and neighbourhood is often given as a reason for staying put. Conversely, some people said that they would not like to move away because it would mean going to a strange place.

iv. Finally, a feeling of being "rooted" to a place, either the home or the neighbourhood is common, to the extent that to live anywhere else is almost unthinkable.

The following chapters are devoted to examining

these themes. Before this, however, there are two caveats to consider. Firstly, there will always be considerable individual differences in respect to home experience, and the themes outlined here contribute to a general understanding of ageing and home. Secondly, although the three themes are treated separately, they are inextricably linked to each other. This should be borne in mind if the holistic nature of home experience is to be fully appreciated.

## Chapter 8

MEMORIES, THE HOME AND THE ELDERLY.



## INTRODUCTION.

It has been established that memories are a particularly significant aspect of home experience amongst elderly people. For example, many older people who live alone still talk about their families and family life as the quality that makes their house into a home. For these people it is the memories that are associated with the place that define their home experience. These may not be direct or "real" experiences, but they nonetheless contribute to the experiential lifeworld, to create a feeling or atmosphere of homeliness. This is most apparent when bereaved people talk about the "presence" in the home of a deceased partner.

In this chapter, the objective is to explore the link between memories and the home in more detail. In particular, attention is given to how memories contribute to the strong desire in many older people to stay put. The immediate problem in this analysis is to define a conceptual framework for the problem. Fortunately, recent work on memory has begun to emphasize processes of remembering as they occur in "natural" contexts, and provide useful models and concepts for the present analysis. The next section is a summary of some of the main principles behind the notion of "memory in the real world". Two subsequent

sections develop in detail two aspects of remembering, "reminiscence" and "spontaneous remembering". These are seen as key concepts for understanding the symbolic and emotional ties between person and home. These theoretical sections are followed by a content analysis of people's accounts of their personal experiences of memories and home. In order to illustrate, validate and extend some of the emergent themes, two case studies are also presented. These are especially valuable as they provide insights into the role memories play in the wider context of changing life situations in old age.

#### REMEMBERING IN THE REAL WORLD

Memory has been an important subject for psychological research for many years. Recently, however, there have been suggestions that too much of this research has been devoted to experimental investigations that artificially define both the context and the content of remembering (Coleman, 1986). Neisser (1978) argues that more attention should be given to the understanding of memory in "natural contexts", that is: "the circumstances in which it occurs, the form it takes, the variables on which it depends, the differences between individuals in their uses of the past" (Neisser, 1978, p12).

In the context of everyday life, remembering should be seen in functional terms. The past, embodied in memories, is used by the individual in different ways for different purposes. Neisser (1978) argues that memory is central to a number of functions, such as the continuity of self, everyday action and intellectual operation. The emotional aspect of remembering should also be considered. A person may recall the past with fondness, while guilt or despair may be a product of unpleasant past experiences.

As well as function, three other issues are important to the understanding of real-world memory: signification, context and consciousness. The first of these relates to the value which is accorded to the memory. For example, a person tends to remember the things that are of interest to them (Bartlett, 1932). The mind is not simply a receptor for images of the past. Recollections of the past are filtered and redefined in the light of the present, while things that are seen as insignificant are eventually forgotten. Linton (1975, 1978, 1982) emphasises the role of the individual as an interpreter of the past in the way events are accorded significance in the context of the person's subsequent lifecourse. This process of signification is a matter of "rewriting" one's personal history in the light of changes in situation and perspective. For example, initially innocuous events,



such as meeting someone for the first time, may later take on emotional significance as that relationship develops.

Another consideration is the context within which remembering takes place. The literature on this issue usually involves a basic thesis: that the "external" context, such as the physical surroundings provides cues by which memories are recalled. These cues can include both intentional memory aids (Harris, 1978) and unintentional environmental cues. Environments can be seen as organised systems that provide structures that facilitate recall (Cole et al, 1981), thus implicating both the person and the environment in the cognitive process of remembering. Again, Neisser's (1978) argument is relevant here; that to understand the process of remembering, then all the relevant variables have to be considered together as a single real-world situation. In the present case, it is how remembering is related to the home context of the older person that is of interest.

Besides the issues of function, significance and context, it is possible to distinguish different levels of consciousness in respect to remembering. For example, the recall of past events in a testimony involves a conscious act of remembering. Other memories, however, may come to mind spontaneously, often

vividly evoking some past event. A further dimension of remembering is suggested by Meacham and Lieman (1981) in their notion of "prospective" remembering, where the emphasis is upon the habitual performance of actions, rather than the conscious recall of action sequences per se. In respect to elderly people, two key themes in the consciousness-remembering relationship deserve further comment: these are reminiscence and spontaneous remembering.

### Reminiscence.

Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary defines 'reminiscence' as "recollection: an account of something remembered: the recurrence to the mind of the past. The definition of 'recollection' provides an interesting clue to the nature of reminiscence: "to recall to memory: to remember, especially by an effort". Essentially, 'reminiscence' is an action. It is to look backwards and to bring to mind occurrences in the past. In certain ways, the memory itself may not be the objective of reminiscence. Chambers TCD suggests that this 'looking-back' can be a matter of "contemplation", "thoughtful consideration", "reflection", where the memory is used for resolving some concern. In varying degrees, 'reminiscence' can be seen as volitional.

A number of theories of ageing have suggested that reminiscence is a necessary part of growing older. In an influential paper, Butler (1963) argues that the process of "life review" is a "naturally occurring, universal mental process...prompted by the realization of approaching dissolution and death". The life review process characteristically includes thinking about oneself and reconsidering past actions and experiences. There is a potential for personality changes as the older person attempts to understand, and reconcile themselves to, their past. The central function of the life review is the continuity of self. In the face of old age, the individual must come to terms with and understand their life in order to accommodate the self of the present. For some people, the outcome may be increased self-awareness and the achievement of "serenity". For others, the inability to come to terms with the past may provoke depression and guilt.

There are parallels between Butler's notion of the life review and Erikson's (1968) "integrity versus despair" stage of life. Again, approaching death is seen as a catalyst for examining one's life. This awareness prompts the individual to look for meaning in their existence. If one feels that life has been worthwhile and meaningful, then this would afford a sense of integrity. Conversely, a feeling of meaninglessness, or a sense that one's life should have



been different, may result in a feeling of disgust or despair. Both Butler's and Erikson's theories agree on one thing; that reminiscence is an active process in coping with the changes in personal circumstances that commonly occur in later life. Lieberman and Tobin (1983) provide a slightly different perspective when they argue that reminiscence represents a reworking of the past, to create a "myth" that defends or justifies an older person's present situation. This contrasts with Butler's perspective, in that the emphasis is upon redefinition and stability, rather than on reconciliation and serenity.

Coleman (1986), in a detailed study of ageing and reminiscence, argues that all these perspectives are valid interpretations of the function of reminiscence. All are consistent in one respect, that "...an essential task of old age is the preservation of a coherent, consistent self in the face of loss and of threat of loss. Reminiscence has a valuable role to play in this defence" (Coleman, 1986, 14). Coleman's analysis focuses on the individual, and through a series of case studies he illustrates the life contexts in which reminiscence contributes to coping with the problems of old age. He was able to define a typology of reminiscence that involves a basic distinction between reminiscers and non-reminiscers. Within these two groups there are varying attitudes to reminiscence which

are associated with morale. Amongst reminiscers, there are those people who describe reminiscence in wholly positive terms, who are associated with high morale. Alternatively, there are some people who are reminiscers, who are troubled by their memories and are associated with low morale. Amongst non-reminiscers, there are some people who see no point in reminiscing and who showed high levels of morale. There were also some non-reminiscers who avoided thinking about the past because it troubled them, and who were generally associated with low morale. The significance of Coleman's work is that he shows that there is no simple association between the tendency to reminisce, attitudes and morale.

Coleman's work suggests that it would be wrong to overemphasise the role of reminiscence amongst the elderly. Reminiscing and memories of the past are significant for people of all ages. Cameron (1972) found no support for the view that older people think more about the past than they do about the present and the future. Indeed, the most significant focus in the stream of consciousness for all ages is the present (Giambra, 1977), and the past does not dominate the thoughts of older people. Reminiscence should not be seen as universal amongst older people, as attitudes and behaviours vary considerably. Lieberman and Tobin (1983) suggest that very old people may have gone



through a phase of life review and now show low levels of introspection. The main point is that reminiscence is a complex process, that is just one among a range of ways of coping in old age.

A final aspect of reminiscence is its relationship to the physical surroundings of the home. There are a number of possible dimensions to this relationship. For example, a person's home may be the scene of many of the occurrences that constitute valued memories. Given that reminiscence can be highly significant for some older people, then it could be hypothesized that greater importance is attached to the home. It may be that older people become more conscious of the significance of their home through reminiscing and life review. There may even be a material parallel of the life review process amongst some elderly people, whereby people revisit the places where they have enacted important scenes in their lives. Fundamental to the issue is that the remembering of events implies the remembering of places (Rowles, 1978). Memories are evocative of places, but equally, places are evocative of memories. It is perhaps unfortunate in present society that if one lives to grow old, then many of the places of one's past are probably no longer in existence. An interesting paper on environmental preservation by Hareven and Langenbach (1981) suggest that although the elderly may be seen to have the most to gain from the replacement of



outmoded and stressful environments, they may have the most to lose in terms of the personal effects of displacement. They argue that the physical environment plays an important part in the preservation of individual identity, and the effect of wholesale redevelopment is to undermine this sense of identity (cf. Marris, 1978; Fried, 1963).

#### Spontaneous Remembering.

Whereas reminiscence has been conceived in terms of a mental act, the idea of spontaneous remembering involves the occurrence of memories outside the volition of the individual. Instead, spontaneous memory occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, and may be incongruent with tasks that are being performed or with preceding trains of thought. Essentially, these memories are outside any conscious, voluntary "control". The present discussion of spontaneous remembering draws mainly upon the book "A Collection of Moments" by Esther Salaman (1970). She outlines the nature of her own memories:

"To sum up my experiences of involuntary memories in Berlin: they always came suddenly, they brought me great joy, and more often than not I lived in the 'then' and forgot the 'now'".

The reason for maintaining the distinction between spontaneous remembering and reminiscence is to emphasize the quality of "reliving the past" that is characteristic of involuntary memories. Salaman makes a fundamental distinction between remembering as a conscious act and as an involuntary memory:

"...I started to write a childhood, doing the very thing Proust felt was hopeless, namely trying to recall the past by collecting my available conscious memories. The result was like a book of pressed flowers. " (Salaman, 1970, p23).

In contrast:

"An involuntary memory has this in common with the solution of an artistic, mathematical, or any other problem: it is a swift and usually unexpected contribution of the unconscious mind, while the conscious mind is taking infinite pains, yet almost immediately one recognises its validity and claims it as one's own".

Unlike conscious recollections, involuntary memories come unbidden, accompanied by the emotions of direct experience. Salaman quotes a phrase of Thomas de Quincey, that these moments are "clothed in all their evanescent circumstances and accompanying feelings".

She describes her own experience of remembering a childhood incident:

"The dog has knocked me over, and I am actually turning my head away and burying my face in the earth while the dog is searching between my petticoats and the long black stockings on my left leg for bare flesh to dig his teeth into. It is like a picture in slow motion. Today I am writing only a memory of a memory, but at the time it came back I was actually that child of three: the 'then' was now, and time stood still" (Salaman, 1970, p24)

The distinction between remembering as a conscious act and a spontaneous, unconscious impression is also made by Jean-Paul Sartre in his novel "Nausea" (1965). The hero, Antoine Roquentin, is a historian and biographer, whose stated purpose in life is to recreate the past in the present. Yet he himself finds that he is losing contact with the reality of his own past:

"Two years ago, it was wonderful: I only had to close my eyes and straight away my head would start buzzing like a beehive: I could conjure up faces, trees, houses, a Japanese girl in Kamaishi bathing naked in a barrel, a dead Russian emptied by a great gaping wound, with all his blood in a pool beside him. I could recapture the taste of



couscous, the smell of olive oil which fills the streets of Burgos at Midday, the smell of fennel which floats through those of Tetuan, the piping of Greek shepherds; I was moved. This joy was worn out a long time ago, is it going to be reborn today?" (p51).

But the freshness that has characterized his remembrances seems to be failing. The significance is not so much that he is forgetting the past, but that memory is being transformed from experience into accounts and stories:

"...nothing is left but words: I could still tell the stories, tell them only too well...but they are only skeletons. They tell about a fellow who does this or that, but it isn't I, I have nothing in common with him. He travels through countries I know no more about than if I had never been in them...All the same, for a hundred dead stories there remain one or two living ones. These I evoke cautiously, occasionally, not too often, for fear of wearing them out. I fish one out. I see once more the setting, the characters, the attitudes. All of a sudden I stop: I have felt a worn patch, I have seen a word poking through the web of sensations. I sense that before long that word is going to take the place of several pictures I love.

Straight away I stop and quickly think of something else; I don't want to tire my memories. In vain; the next time I evoke them, a good part will have congealed" (52-53).

The common theme of these passages from "Nausea" and "A Collection of Moments" is the vividness and directness, and sense of experiencing, that sometimes accompanies a memory. For the individual, these relict experiences, impressions, and accompanying emotions can be as "real" as the experiences of the present. This quality of memories, and fantasy in general, has persuaded Graham Rowles (1978) to argue that the geographical "lifeworld" should not be restricted to present happenings, if one is to understand the geographical experience of elderly people.

A further issue, is the link between memory and place. It should be emphasised that many of the principles outlined in respect to reminiscence are applicable to spontaneous remembering. In particular, the hypothesized links between memories and the environment may be common to both modes. In the case of spontaneous remembering, the emphasis is perhaps on place being evocative of memories rather than vice versa, unconscious rather than conscious remembering. Salaman is ambivalent about this link. She suggests that involuntary memories can occur without external

environmental stimuli, but goes on to quote a passage from Proust:

"A smell meets me as I enter a certain house when to be sure I had not come expecting to find beauty, but suddenly it is of beauty that I am conscious. The smell is that of a house where once we spent some time at the seaside, a deplorable wooden villa. Each time I entered it, I caught that special smell. It was a place where I had been sad" (Salaman, 1970, p47).

Sensations, such as smell, or hearing a particular sound, or seeing a particular object, can trigger past associations. But it would be unwise to see this as stimulus-response phenomena. The link is not straightforward. For instance, a personal object may sometimes evoke vivid memories with which it is associated, while on other occasions the object provokes no such reaction. The "chemistry" of the relationship deserves further investigation, but for now, the link between the physical world and remembering has to be accepted as a part of common experience.



## HOME AND REMEMBERING.

Although a distinction has been made between reminiscence and spontaneous remembering, the separation of the two modes of remembering is somewhat artificial. For example, people who are reminiscing do not consciously retrieve every detail of an event, so that reminiscence can be seen as "focussing" on some past event and allowing memories to develop and unfold. In this way, the memories are outside the "control" of the reminiscer, and can be seen to be "spontaneous" or "involuntary". Moreover, one should not assume that the act of reminiscence is undertaken intentionally. Daydreaming, fantasising and reminiscing are activities which may in themselves occur spontaneously. Nevertheless, the distinction between reminiscing as an action and spontaneous remembering is intuitively valid and is implicit in the literature on real-world memory.

In the present context, the two aspects of remembering are discussed in experiential terms: their functions and value for the individual; the situations in which remembering occurs; and how it is perceived, understood and experienced by individuals. The issue was explored empirically by asking participants about the memories they had concerning their home, and whether they thought that their home helped to preserve their

memories? Table 3.1 provides a summary of their responses.

#### Focus of memories.

What did participants talk about when they described their memories? Broadly speaking the content of people's memories falls into two groups: people and events. Over half the participants mentioned people, while a quarter mentioned certain events in their life. In practice, it is difficult to separate people from events, memories were usually described in terms of people doing things. However, some people referred to particularly significant life events that happened in their homes: the birth of children; the death of parents; children "getting married from the home"; anniversary parties; the death of a spouse. The memory of significant or critical experiences is usually strongly associated with the place where they occurred (Sixsmith, 1984).

It is interesting that a number of people said that they did not have any significant memories of their home, that "nothing has ever really happened here". Amongst these people were those who did not attach much value to the past as a dimension of home experience. But the absence of critical experiences in the history of the home does not mean that the place is not a source

Table 8.1 Memories and the Home.

Category	Observation	No. of mentions
Focus of memories	People	20
	Events- specific	9
	Events- nothing really happened here	5
Role of memories	Good memories	7
	Good and bad memories	5
	Supportive	6
	Presence	4
Memories and place	Memories tied to the house	7
	Keep house same as before	2
	Memories transportable	6
	Memories of last house	5
	Knick-knacks	5
Perspective	Like to reminisce	4
	Memories are not important	1
	Not backward-looking	5
	Don't like to think of past	1
	Everything is nostalgic	1
	Backward-looking	2
		(n=36)



of memories? Often it is the little things in life that take on significance over time, where the trivial and takes on significance in the context of an unfolding life (Linton, 1980). For example:

"We've lived here for years. The daughter would bring all her friends from college and that. We've been here all our married life. You can picture Bill, our friend, sitting here in the living room, as he would have been here this afternoon to play dominoes" (25).

For this man, a fairly mundane aspect of his life, something that was at one time just a pleasant part of the weekly routine, has taken on great personal significance, in the light of the recent death of his friend and the fondness with which he regards his daughter.

#### Role of memories.

Much theoretical work has examined the role that memories play in individual identity and self-definition. In the present context, however, it is how the participants interpreted the role of memories in their everyday experience that is of interest.

i. Good memories. Firstly, some people talked about their memories in very positive terms. Sometimes this was tinged with regret, for a part of life that now only exists in the mind. For other people these were simply cherished memories that provided considerable warmth and happiness. Again, memories of loved ones figured prominently, particularly the memories of children growing up in the home. Looking back and reminiscing for these people was primarily a pleasant activity. The home was seen as a place of happiness in the past. Sometimes these happy associations are carried through into the present, contributing to a happy "atmosphere" in the home, even though the person's life situation may be radically altered.

ii. Good and bad memories. Very few people would be able to truthfully say that their lives were entirely happy. Memories comprise occurrences that may be seen as either good or bad, times of happiness and times of sorrow. For instance:

"I was married before. We used to live over in Walker. I would be telling a lie if I said it was happy there. I used to go out to work in the morning and it would be great, like a weight going from my shoulders. I remember coming back home on the bike after work and the closer I got home the worse I felt" (51).

This was a source of regret for this man. His previous marriage had been very unhappy and the painful experience and memory of life at home in this period was not offset by any particularly fond memories. Other people talked about sorrowful times at home: the death of a spouse or a parent were commonly mentioned. Although sorrowful, the characteristic of these memories along with happy memories was that they were of great poignancy to the individuals concerned. These are certainly the "critical experiences" that are central to some people's experience of place. Proshansky (1979) notes that the adaptive responses of the individual are not just a matter of personality, but are also a function of the kind of event, its specific features, the point in the life cycle, and the setting in which it occurred. The adjustment to an altered situation emphasises the role of environments, such as the home as a source of physical and psychological support. This has implications for a person's "place-identity" (Proshansky, 1978, 1983), where place is a key aspect of one's concept of self. The fact that the home was the scene of what happened often lends the place great symbolic value. The home evokes a sense of the past, it is a physical reminder of what happened and it is the focus of remembering. This is reflected in the two other roles of memories: psychological support and personification.



iii. Memories as supports. A number of people talked about their memories as supports in the present. In all cases, the death of a loved one was also mentioned. People talked about how their memories of a dead parent or spouse helped them to get over their bereavement. Memories were often closely linked with the home and these associations between place and the past provided comfort and psychological support:

"We moved in here in 1953 to be next to my mother. She lived downstairs and we had the upstairs flat. I was the only daughter. She needed someone to keep an eye on her and I was the only one. My mother went eight years ago. It was very hard getting used to it. Your memories do help. You can look back at things and it helps. It would be funny going anywhere else, we've lived in it so long. You get very attached to it" (11).

For people such as this lady, the home provides a continuity between past and present. The home was the major scene of family life and many memories will be recollections of life in the home. The home, in some ways, can be a constant factor as the circumstances of family life may have changed: it still remains the place of family life by association, and helps to preserve a valued past. The consciousness of the role of the home,

in maintaining the past in the present, seems to be a major dimension of attachment to home.

iv. Presence. The last issue was most evident amongst those people who felt that they were still close to a deceased husband or wife when they were in their homes. For these people the associations between past and present are so strong that the word "memory" is perhaps inadequate in describing their experiences. Rees (1975) points out that hallucinations after bereavement is a very common experience amongst all types of people. He notes that these may be auditory or visual hallucinations, but in most cases the experience is usually a feeling of "presence". Marris (1986) suggests that these illusions, especially the more concrete ones, can be disturbing, and discusses the issue in very negative terms, such as feelings of futility and withdrawal. However, Rees (1975) argues that hallucinations are usually a helpful psychological experience, providing a valuable source of support to the bereaved individual. This was true for many of the participants. For example:

"The house helps to keep your spirits up. Sometimes when you are sitting here, you imagine he is here, like he's here in the room. And you feel that your family is here, especially my youngest brother and my daughter" (65).

The most common term used by participants was that they had feelings of "closeness" to their loved one. This seemed to be talked about in a positive way; the feeling of closeness was a source of comfort and support when you are feeling low. The significance of the home is that it provides a necessary continuity of place for these feelings to emerge.

#### Memories and place.

The home however, is not just the focus of the memories, but is also implicated in the process of remembering for some people. An issue that emerged is that many people feel that their memories are in some way "tied" to their home:

"Oh this place has a lot of memories for me. I think they help. There are both happy memories and others. They are just there, I don't know why. I was very close to my father. He died 13 years ago. He died downstairs. Because he lived in the same place, you feel closer to him. If we moved away, I would definitely lose the memories" (66).

The link between home and memories is very strong for the people who have lived a significant part of



their lives in that place. The house acts as a constant reminder of what has happened there in the past and evokes the sense that you are still close to the people that have shared that home. To move away from this place would be to move away from the "presence" or "closeness" that they feel. However, this was not the case for everyone who was interviewed, and a number of people said that their memories were "transportable". In particular, personal objects were important for people who had recently moved, helping to create a sense of the past in a new house.

Home, however, is not just the substance memories, or the prompter of memories, but is also the place FOR remembering. This applies to people who feel that their memories are tied to the specific place and to those people who have moved their memories with them. For this latter group, the home is the place where personal objects are kept, it is the place where they can think upon the objects and reminisce. For the former group home is the place that they feel close to the people of the past and it affords an appropriate context for reminiscing. These two dimensions of the home-memory link are most apparent in some widowed people who consciously decided to maintain their home as it was in the past. Gorer (1965) calls this action "mummification", and cites Queen Victoria as the most "notorious" example, in her obsession with preserving

the objects of Prince Albert just as he left them. Peter Marris (1986) also emphasises the morbid, obsessive qualities of preserving the past. Whether this is a matter of obsession or a natural and unconscious action after bereavement is debatable. The point still remains that the home is both the prompter of memories and the place of reminiscence.

#### Individual perspective.

A final aspect of the remembering-place relationship involves the person's own attitude to their past, as there are considerable individual differences in this respect (Coleman, 1986). In the present research, some people said that they liked to reminisce and clearly valued their memories of the past. Other reminiscers talked in more compulsive terms, that they were "backward-looking" and that their memories were all they had left in the world. Conversely, some people said that they were not particularly concerned with the past, while some were totally disinterested. Other people agreed that their memories were important, but stressed that they were not backward-looking. One should also consider the experience of one man who was troubled by his memories and consciously tried to avoid remembering the past:

"What memories I have, have gone west now. At 91 you don't always feel like remembering things. I've had good and bad memories, but I have lost a son and daughter and the wife. I don't like thinking about the family much. I weep a bit. I try not to remember" (33).

One might expect that the individual's attitude towards reminiscing is also reflected in the value they place on their homes. For instance, are reminiscers more attached to their homes than non-reminiscers. Are obsessive reminiscers equally obsessed by their homes as the scene of their past lives? There are indications that such a relationship does occur. However, to stress this simple equation as the main tie between person and home would be facile, as other significant and competing issues that may be relevant to the individual.

Undoubtably, memories are important for the elderly, and contribute to a feeling of "attachment" to the home (O'Bryant and Wolf, 1983), but many of the interviews involved rather impersonal and prosaic accounts of what was expected to be a highly emotive issue. The difficulty was that complex environmental experiences are not easily accessed by direct questioning (Howell, 1983). Moreover, the theoretical discussion of real world memory suggests that remembering is often an unconscious or practical



activity that does not occur at a discursive level. In this respect, an in-depth approach was essential to the research, allowing a longer and closer relationship to develop with participants. Two case studies are presented in the following sections.

#### ROBERT LANGHAM

Robert was born in the West End of Newcastle in 1909. He and his family moved into his present council house on the Scotswood estate in 1945, after living in a number of rented flats in nearby Benwell since his marriage to Millie in 1936. The new house represented a major milestone in Robert's life. Robert and Millie brought two sons up in the house. Both were married and set up their own homes in the early 1960's, and both now live outside the North-east. Robert's wife died in 1966, so in the space of just a few years the situation at home had completely changed. In 1976 Robert was semi-paralysed by a stroke. He can walk about in the house, but needs to be pushed in a wheelchair outside.

For Robert his family meant everything. Nowadays he mainly lives on his fierce will to be independent, his memories and the visits from his two sons. The significance of family life to him is reflected on his

personal meaning of home; home meant family life to Robert and it is still the scene of family life in his memories:

"Well, it's your wife and kiddies that makes your home. The family makes it. You both pull together like. Husband and wife sharing all the things makes it a happy home. Now it is thinking about all the good times you had in here, instead of just sitting and moping. I've got memories of the wife and things. I've done nowt wrong in the house as far as that's concerned you see. So therefore, when I think of Millie, I think she's beside me. I'm thinking, not talking to yourself like. I've had my married life here you see. It brings memories back to me".

Robert values his independence very highly, which partly accounts for the parallel value he places on having his own home, even in the face of quite serious disability. Independence, however, is not the only factor. Robert cherishes the memories of his past family life, memories which are enshrined in his home:

"This place has kept me going. I could have moved to a bungalow when Millie died. I said 'I stay here'. The person not here has kept me going, the wife like. What she's done I do now. I keep the

things going as if she's still here. I have all the photo's. I have them all over the house, here and in the bedroom".

The home provides a link with the past, a sense of continuity, a feeling that his wife is "still here". He also consciously maintains this sense, by keeping the house more or less the same as before, by following many of the patterns and rituals of daily life from when his wife was still alive. Personal objects, such as photographs and ornaments are also valued by Robert:

"You keep little things to bring memories back. But if you get new furniture it is still the same house. When I look at that picture I can say I know where that's come from. They all bring memories back. But it's the house itself that is the foundations. The house that is built on a rock. It will always be here to come back to. Built on a rock. I keep the same things going even though she is not here. I give her a hand and do all things she used to do. This place is married to me and I am married to this place you see".

He emphasised the comfort and help that his home has afforded him, especially since his stroke. Loneliness is a problem with Robert. He had always been an active man, and being unable to get out and about is



very frustrating to him. Like many of the people who were interviewed, isolation and loneliness were not translated into feelings of being "trapped" or "imprisoned". Although the home is the place of their isolation, it is also usually seen as a supportive environment. This was definitely the case with Robert:

"As I said before, it's a happy house to me. It's the memories that just come back to me. Any time I get a bit despondant, I say 'pull yourself together, Millie wouldn't have you like this', and that's it. I've got Millie with us in here. You might think I am talking silly. Never let it get you down. As long as you've got your computer (mind) going, you are alright. As soon as you let it get you down, you might as well say right- ta da".

His home is perhaps supportive in a number of ways. Firstly, it has the associations with the past, and Robert's memories are clearly important to him. Secondly, the place helps him to find the courage and resolution to carry on living there under physically and psychologically demanding circumstances. Finally, his home is also the object and reason for carrying on. The home is central to Robert's life. Although one could say that there have been considerable changes in Robert's life, in a way the home remains constant. As

with many of the participants, this unchanging quality is manifested in a feeling of "presence", that Robert's wife is still with him:

"Nothing's changed really, over the years. Just as I say, losing Millie. But it has not changed me about this place. In fact it makes me closer to it. It brings back what we used to do together. I feel that she is around here. Her spirit's around here. She's looking after me. That's why I lasted so long".

Although memories are important to Robert, he could not be described as being obsessed with the past. Indeed, he is very interested in current affairs and politics, after being a union representative and Labour Party member for most of his life. Very often the interviews with Robert would comprise heated political invective. His other interests include football and racing on the TV. Despite the difficult circumstances of his life Robert seems to have accepted and adjusted to his situation. One could perhaps define Robert as a well-adjusted "reminiscer" in Coleman's (1986) terms. His daily routine indicates that he spends little time just sitting and thinking. Most of his day is spent either watching TV or reading, and doing his household chores. These activities do not necessarily exclude reminiscing, and Robert may have spent time thinking

back during the day. A "yesterday diary" of his activities, revealed that Robert does devote some time entirely to reminiscing. In fact, there is a particular place in the house that is associated with reminiscing. The Scotswood estate is built on a steep hillside overlooking the Tyne from the north. The river is visible along with the industrial sites that line its banks. Other landmarks include the Scotswood Bridge and on the Gateshead side of the Tyne is the new Metro shopping centre and in the distance are the hills of County Durham. The view from the window in the front bedroom is exceptional, especially on sunny evenings. This is a special place for Robert:

"The best part of this house is that it's facing south. You can just go upstairs and see all of County Durham. I like to go upstairs and think about things. You can remember how everything used to be. The house helps me when I'm lonely. I can go look out of the front bedroom window and look out over to Durham like. The view is marvellous in summer. You can see right over. Millie's sister lives over there. I certainly miss her (Millie)".

The view is important to Robert, he likes to look out over to Durham, the place where his wife came from. He can also see the comings and goings that occur in the small square that his house overlooks. This



"surveillance zone" has been shown to be significant for many older people (Rowles, 1981). However, it is not just the view. Sitting in the front bedroom, next to the window, is a place where Robert likes to think back. It provides the context for reminiscing, it has the appropriate mood or atmosphere when Robert is remembering the past.

Two issues emerge from Robert's case; that he values, and finds comfort in, his memories, and that his home is an important material context for remembering the past. Given this, it is surprising that Robert was trying to move house, throughout the time he was participating in the case study. The reasons behind this move became the focus of several interviews with Robert, as it was thought that an understanding of his apparently inconsistent objectives might shed light on some important aspects of home experience. It was put to Robert that he was very fond of his house, so why did he want to move away from it? He began by saying that he was perfectly happy with the house, and that it was the neighbourhood that he was dissatisfied with:

"The people in the square are getting worse. It was a lovely little place when we moved in. People couldn't do enough for you. But it is getting beyond a joke with all the riff-raff coming in now. I raised the roof at the Labour Club when they

started moving the problem families in. I told them that that type of person will never learn anything from people like me. There's a lot of riff-raff hanging about now. They call it 'Knocking-shop Square' around here. There's a lot of noise late on and early in the morning and the cars don't belong here either".

Robert is generally disenchanted with the area. He has been broken into four times, and he is now unable to keep his garden nice, as it is invariably destroyed by vandals. He otherwise sings the praises of the area, especially the people he knows and who have been supportive over the years. Nevertheless, he feels that the area is now "beyond a joke".

Robert has made an application to move to another council house in the small mining village of Hamsterley Colliery in County Durham. Why is this place so important to him? It is important to stress that Robert's dissatisfaction with his neighbourhood was ambivalent, and was not enough in itself to make Bert want to move away: "if I wasn't going to Hamsterley Colliery, I wouldn't be moving at all". The significance of this place is that it is the place where Robert's wife originally came from. It is a place that has strong associations with the past:

"I was married up there. I courted up there. I used to go up there when I was a kid, so I know all the places around. It has a lot of memories for me. It gave a happy life to Millie up there. It's lovely, a country village, the Derwent River, Chopwell Woods. We used to go walking around there. I have good memories of the place. I can remember sitting on the wall of the church yard on my wedding day, waiting for Millie. I have good memories of Hamsterley. At one time I didn't like it up there much. It was a terrible place in winter. You see the winters were bad in them days. You couldn't move up there. And the houses were cold, no central heating or hot water then. Millie used to live down the bottom in the pit houses in the valley. The home help's husband used to live opposite Millie, so I knew him. I know the area well. I like it up there very much now; nice walks. I wouldn't move anywhere else".

The fondness that Robert has for the place is obvious and provides one of the answers why he wishes to move. In terms of memories, Hansterley Colliery is perhaps just as significant as his present home. He did not appear to have many misgivings about leaving his house in Scotswood:

"Oh aye I would make it my home, if I moved. It is



up to yourself. If you make up your mind you don't like it, that's it. It's just what you put in and you say that this is the place I am living and I have to stay here. Being awkward doesn't get you anywhere. If I had to move, I would put it on one side like you've got to. But you still think of whoever it is where you are going to, and then you've got to start again. I cannot take the house with us, but I can take the memories of the house with us. But I would never move anywhere else. I never think about anywhere else. If I had to move anywhere else I would feel awful".

The final caveat is significant. He would not consider moving anywhere else. Robert is a very determined person and would never willingly give up his present house unless it was to go to Hamsterley Colliery. In some ways Robert has two homes, each with different characteristics, each of which are personally significant to him. This is perhaps an unusual case, and Robert was unique amongst the research participants in this respect. Nevertheless, one should not simply equate home with house, as home can be a complex interaction between person and place, with the individual assigning the label "home" to several different places (Sixsmith, 1986). For most older people, however, it is likely that they define their present house as their sole "home". There were

indications that other people had similar motivations as Robert. For example, some people expressed a wish to move to places they had known well in the past, such as favourite holiday resorts. But no person, except for Robert, had seriously considered moving, unless it was for practical reasons.

It is important to examine the circumstances within which Robert made his decision to move. He has had home helps since his stroke and he has remained close to Jean, who was the first one. She gave up the job to get married and she moved to Hamsterley Colliery, where her husband lived. Jean regularly visits Bert, and he has been to her house for holidays. This occurrence of a friend moving to an important scene of his earlier life was a coincidence, a matter of chance, but one that was an essential factor in changing Robert's view of his future. Prior to this, he had no intention of moving, the possibility had not even been seriously considered. In fact it was Jean who suggested that Robert should move to her village. It was only then that the move became a realistic course of action. Once the possibility had been established, the advantages and disadvantages could be evaluated. Robert had also stayed with Jean and her family. He enjoyed himself very much there:

"I went for a fortnight this year. That changed my

mind about moving. I enjoyed myself. I didn't want to come home".

All these circumstances were necessary factors for formulating the decision to move, and all were outside the direct control of Robert. This suggests several relevant facets to the understanding of home experience in later life.

i. Firstly, the force of circumstance is crucial in understanding housing behaviour. Bandura (1982) emphasises the role of 'chance encounters' in shaping the course of human life. He argues that neither personal attributes nor situational factors operate independently. In Robert's case, the decision to move required the fortuitous interplay of a number of factors. One must compare Robert's case with those of other participants. As was shown earlier, very few have either the motivation or the opportunity to move from their present homes.

ii. Following this, one should not assume that the desire to stay put is an inevitable aspect of old age. One might expect that retirement migrants and people who move for instrumental reasons constitute the totality of movers in old age. But given the right circumstances someone like Robert may decide to move and confound expectations.



iii. Robert's case puts the issue of memories in an interesting perspective. Robert's comments on the memories he has of his house in Scotswood, could serve as a classic example of why older people prefer to stay put. Important points in his account include: happy memories of family life in the house; a feeling of closeness to his deceased wife; a special place in the house for reminiscing. All these issues were raised by other people as reasons why they desired to stay put. If the possibility of moving had not developed in Robert's case, his accounts could also be reasonably interpreted as the ties that bind him to his present home and instil a desire to stay put. To look at this from a slightly different perspective, one should not assume that memories and attachment to home are the prerogatives of the elderly. What one might conclude is that the context within which ideas and goals are formulated and decisions made, are different for the elderly. For many of these people, the future offered few opportunities outside maintaining the status quo. Moreover, memories and reminiscing are often a major focus of elderly people's lives. This was very much the case with Robert, although its expression, in respect to housing behaviour, reflected other unique but significant considerations.

## MRS BREWER

Mrs Brewer was born in 1913 in Cleethorpes. She moved to Newcastle when she was married in 1942. She has been a widow since 1977 and lives alone in Victorian end of terrace house in Heaton, on the eastern side of the city. This has been her home since 1943, and memories of her life there were a dominant aspect of her home experience. Mrs Brewer talked a lot about her early years in the house. It was wartime and household goods that are taken for granted nowadays were often unobtainable luxuries. Improvisation was the key:

"I made some curtains during the war out of butter muslin. They were lovely. I was very proud. I am very proud of my windows. We did a lot of improvising in the war. You couldn't buy carpets. We had underfelt on the floor and I dyed it all with a maroon dye. It covered the whole floor. People are always sorry for young people setting-up house, because things are so expensive. But it was worse in those days. All you used to get was what you could afford. All that improvisation made me appreciate the house. I am more attached to it".

These memories were important for Mrs Brewer, forming a detailed account of how her "temporary" house

was transformed into a home. Attachment to place grew as she became aware of how much had been put into the place, materially and psychologically. Memories of these early years continually reinforce the personal significance of home. They tell of the early years of marriage and home-building, which were, in a sense, synonymous for Mrs Brewer:

"It grows on you. LIke I said, when we came here, we thought it was temporary. Then we began to spend money on it. We immediately changed the paintwork. It had an open grate and a range. We got that out as soon as possible. We just tried to make it suit our needs. When Jim had his heart trouble, we thought we should have a bungalow- no stairs. But we just knew we were going to stay here. He liked it a lot. I think I would have moved of the two of us. We did a lot to it. Then you realise it is your house and you want to stay. You change your thinking and you put value on it, but you do it in your own way. I wouldn't move now. I would have to be forced into it now".

As with many people, Mrs Brewer said that personal objects brought back many memories. It was the little things that held particular significance. She described an occurrence from the previous week, which highlighted the role of objects, but also indicated a possible role



of home in the process of remembering:

"I was tidying my drawer out and I found an old photograph of a dinner party we went to. I made that dress I wore. My husband helped me. I made it on the floor here".

She pointed to the floor of the parlour. She knew that the purpose of the interview was to talk about her memories, and she realised immediately the significance of the gesture. The photograph had provided the initial prompt in a chain of remembrance: the party, the dress, making the dress, her husband helping. But in remembering the memory she had carried it further: the remembrance of moving back the chairs, of laying out, and cutting out the material. These were memories of details of an event that occurred in that very room, details evoked by being in that room. This was more than recall, it was a brief re-experience of what had happened many years ago. Mrs Brewer knew that without being in that room this could not have happened. She went on to say:

"I suppose your memories wouldn't be the same if I wasn't here. I would probably be able to tell people about it, but it wouldn't be the same as having it on the floor in front of me".

The power of the image was such that it was as if she had just had the dress laid out on the floor: "it wouldn't be the same as having it (the dress) on the floor in front of me". A further instance of an involuntary memory occurred during another conversation with Mrs Brewer. Initially, Mrs Brewer had not been able to think of any clear association between her home and particular memories. The issue of specific personal objects was obvious, but the house itself had not been a fruitful topic. The conversation had gone on to the topic of tidiness, but Mrs Brewer revealed an important link between home and involuntary remembering:

"To me a home is a place that is not too tidy. When children daren't live in it, it can't be a home. But there is a happy medium. I am not a houseproud person, but I don't like too much of a muddle. When Jim was alive, I would hate things being left on the sideboard. There by the door. He used to come in from work and put things down there. It used to annoy me. But ever since he has gone, there are always things on the sideboard there. He did it to me. I often think of him then. It's funny, I have tried to tidy it up, but they always end up here. Whenever, I am looking for something I say 'oh Jim, where is it'".

Mrs Brewer recounted this with an emphasis that

betrayed the emotion of direct experience, rather than detached recall. An experience of involuntary memory had been evoked by something that was highly specific to the house. It was the outcome of the interaction of a number of things: the objects, such as the sideboard and the clutter on it; the location of those things by the door and in that room. This interaction was paramount in evoking that memory. The objects in themselves were not sufficient. It was the place, or configuration of things, that was important. Without the recreation of the scene, remembering would not be possible, or at least the memory would lose the spontaneity of re-experience that was so apparent on this occasion.

It is impossible to say how important this home-memory relationship is, in terms of Mrs Brewer's experience of home. One could suppose that many such incidents occur during the day, most of which are probably immediately forgotten. But if the experience of involuntary memories is to almost relive the past, or to provoke strong emotions, then the significance of the house as a prompt to remembering may be to recreate the past as part of the present home experience. Certainly, many participant's talked about the "atmosphere" in their homes. Many people who lived on their own said that their homes were happy places, the happiness persisting in their memories, but nonetheless experienced as happiness. The home provides a context



for experiential continuity between past and present. For Mrs Brewer, this is manifested in her feelings that her husband's presence was in the house:

"It's your home. You can shut your door and do what you like, and say what you like. I don't feel nervous here. I have spent all my married life here. I am not a spiritualist. If I am in a quandry, I feel he is still here with me. I wouldn't have felt that if I had moved away from this place. If I moved away from this place, the memories would not be there. That is what is important. When I have a problem, I think 'what am I going to do', and my mind sort of clears. It is because I feel Jim is still here".

Like many other bereaved people who were interviewed, this feeling of "presence" was important to Mrs Brewer. She finds this presence a comfort and a support. Moreover, it is the home that provides the context in which she feels close to her husband. To leave that house would also mean leaving her husband behind. But it would be wrong to think of Mrs Brewer as obsessive about the past, or that she has not been able to come to terms with her husband's death. In fact, she is a very active lady, who has found new directions for her life since she has been alone:

"I go to the Townswomen's Guild every month. It has been a life saver to me. You meet so many people with no interest outside the family. We do a lot for charity. I am also chairman of the drama group. We meet every week at the school and in each others' homes. We have quite a social life. We enjoy going to the theatre. We have outings, usually to the Theatre Royal. I also play bowls. I play in Byker under cover in winter. If you don't have these interests, you would be stuck in the house. I joined the Townswomen's Guild twenty years ago and I have done all these other things since then. I was very shy when I first joined. I got drawn into it over the years. As you get older, you change throughout your life. I am not so shy any more. Your life makes you change. I have had to stand on my own two feet. If there is the couple, you rely on each other. On your own it is up to you. In the Townswomen's Guild, many of us are like that. You have to stand up for yourself. You have to do something. There are bowling clubs and there are pubs for men to go to. But you have to go out and find them. Some old people stay at home and say there is nothing around here for them to do, but you have to go out and find it for yourself. It doesn't come and find you".

Mrs Brewer feels that she has changed a lot since her husband died. On the one hand she is "more outgoing and less shy". But on the other, she is also "more happy to be on my own". It is possible to detect two directions in Mrs Brewer's life. Her activities and interests represent the more outgoing person that she feels she has become over the last few years. Alternatively, there is a side to her that requires solitude; a need that has again only emerged since the death of her husband. There is a spatial dimension to this. Most of her social activities take place outside her house, while the home is essentially a place where she is alone.

"You can shut your door and do what you like and say what you like. I go out quite a lot, but when you come in and lock your door, you are in your own home again. It is nice to get back. Even when you have been on holiday, it is nice to get back. I think everybody feels like that don't they? I suppose I know it so well. When I go to my daughter's, I always come back here to sleep. I always want to come back to my own home. It's nice to get back".

Her house is, in some ways, a sanctuary, a place to return to and relax. She mentioned that she enjoyed shopping in the town, but she also said how tiring she



found it and that she liked to get home and put her feet up. The significance of the home is that it very much a place to be alone, a place of privacy and a place to be quiet. Although being alone is inevitable it is also something that is appreciated. The privacy afforded by the home is a part of how she has come to terms with her bereavement. Her social life is important, but so is her life at home. In one way they are mutually exclusive. Her home represents continuity with the past. It is the place where she feels the "presence" of her husband. She is not obsessed with reminiscing, but the past plays as significant part in her life as the present. Whereas she has gone out to look for new things to fill her life, her home is a place that wishes to keep unchanged:

"I haven't changed anything in the six years since Jim's death. I am sure I haven't changed anything. I know a few people who do this. I know a lady who has now started to make her house suit herself more. I couldn't change things. I go abroad now, which is something we didn't do before. I don't feel guilty about it. I would feel guilty about changing the house though. It's keeping the past alive. It's something that you do. That's the case with me. I like to keep things the same way to preserve the past and keep it alive. Look at the greenhouse. It's my monument. It was bought

for Jim. It reminds me of him. So, I couldn't part with it. He used to go in for the six months retirement he had, but he couldn't dig in the garden or that kind of things".

To summarize, with the death of her husband, Mrs Brewer not only had to overcome the grief of losing him, but she also had to come to terms with a completely new life situation. In her own words, she made her "mind up to get on with it". For Mrs Brewer, life took two directions: the first was outwards to find new activities and friends; the second was inwards to her life as a person living alone. Coming to terms with the bereavement was not a matter of losing herself in new experiences, it also involved making room in her new life for the past that she valued. Her home played an important part in preserving the continuity between her past and present life. Her home was the focus of happy memories, while the fabric of the place itself evoked a tangible sense of the past.

#### CONCLUSION.

One should not see remembering as the prerogative of the elderly. Memories are important for people throughout their lives. Yet the emphasis placed by the

elderly on remembering the past indicates a special role for memories in later life, in which the home environment itself is an important component. This paper has explored the nature and role of memories in later life and the role of the home environment in the process of remembering. To conclude, it is valuable to draw together the theoretical and empirical dimensions that have emerged during the analysis.

The theoretical discussion centred around a distinction between reminiscence and spontaneous remembering. Theoreticians have tended to emphasise reminiscence as a coping process for dealing with the many problems and changes that can confront older people, such as bereavement and disability. Certainly, the participants in the present study, who said that memories were important to them, were mostly people who had lost loved ones. These people usually derived comfort and support from remembering the past. However, the idea of remembering as a coping process perhaps fails to capture the full significance of memories amongst older people. This was the motivation behind the discussion of spontaneous remembering, where the emphasis was placed upon memories as part of the lived experience of the present.

The home environment to play an important part in the process of remembering. It is possible to identify



a number of facets of this relationship:

i. Memories OF the home. Memories of events imply memories of places. The home is a scene of family life and consequently constitutes much of the substance of a person's memories. These memories are pertinent to people of various ages and are not specific to the elderly. However, they perhaps take on a greater significance in the context of old age. The loss of a husband or wife, or the moving away of children, may prompt a re-evaluation of past events, and memories OF home to be accorded greater significance. This is evident in the accounts presented in this chapter.

ii. Memories BY the home. The house, its rooms, and objects in the home provide cues which evoke memories. The associations between the physical environment and the past can be very strong, to the extent that some older people feel the "presence" of a deceased spouse when they are in the house. The case study of Mrs Scott illustrates how the home environment can afford spontaneous remembering; memories that come unbidden and for a few moments vividly recreate past episodes in the present. People are not simply restricted to the here and now. The faculties of imagination and remembering can expand the experiential world far beyond the confines of the present. This may be important for the house-bound or people who live alone and whose lives may

seem superficially empty. As Rowles (1978) points out, fantasy (of which remembering is part) "makes men free".

iii. Home as the place FOR memories. In this case, the home is perceived to have a special role of preserving memories, or as the place in which reminiscence takes place. The role of the home cannot be dissociated from the significance placed upon memories of the past. For those people who have suffered loss or significant change, the past is a highly pertinent aspect of their experience. The desire to keep the past alive is paralleled by a desire to maintain the home as the scene of past events. Hence, many people expressed the feeling that to leave their homes would be to leave the past behind; something which they are understandably reluctant to do. The home is seen as a way of preserving memories, and preserving the continuity of a valued past.

The case studies are instructive in that they emphasise the complexity of the person-home relationship in later life. Specifically, it is necessary to place remembering in the wider context of a person's life. Mrs Brewer appears to have two directions to her life that is reflected in her environmental experience; solitude and society, home and not-home. Even though she has reoriented her life in many ways since the death of her husband, she still maintains the continuity of

past experiences in the context of her home. Her past is very pertinent to her, and is "preserved" in the home. Home is the place FOR the past, it is particularly the place where remembering can take place. For example, Robert would often sit and reminisce next to a specific window. It has been noted that some commentators have felt that the preservation of the "material" past, can represent an obsession, rather than an adequate resolution of one's situation (Gorer, 1965; Marris, 1986). However, for Mrs Brewer, the preservation of the past in the home is matched by her new life and activities outside her home. Surely these must both represent valid approaches to coping with old age.



## Chapter 9

### FAMILIARITY WITH THE HOME ENVIRONMENT.

## FAMILIAR AND UNFAMILIAR PLACES.

One of the important aspects of the remembering-home relationship is the sense of continuity afforded by the home environment. In time, one builds up a relationship with a place where past experiences contribute to a feeling of "familiarity" and attachment to home. It is this issue that is the focus of the present chapter.

The analysis of participant's attitudes to "staying put" in Chapter 7, revealed a polarity between familiar and unfamiliar places. Home is a familiar environment. Many people saw little point in moving from a place that they knew so well. Their houses and neighbourhoods may be places that they have known a long time, where they feel "rooted". Their neighbourhood might be valued because family, friends and acquaintances live there. To leave the locale would mean the upheaval of leaving all these things behind. Conversely, non-home places are often defined as unfamiliar environments. Many participants were apprehensive about having to move to an unfamiliar place. Insight into this issue is provided by Yi-fu Tuan in his book "Landscapes of Fear". He argues that, in making sense of the world,

"The human mind is an ambivalent gift. It presents us with a large, orderly and beautiful world, but

also with images of chaos evil and death" (Yi-fu Tuan, 1979, p216).

This ambivalence is reflected in our place experience. There is a basic need for security, stability and order. A need for a place in which we are "cared for" and in which we can be "without care". This is an aspect of dwelling that contributes to our definition of "home". Beyond the home are the landscapes of fear; places of danger, uncertainty and insecurity. Yi-fu Tuan suggests that the minimum requirement for a secure place is a boundary. Boundaries can exist at different levels, such as: the body; the house; and the domain. These boundaries may be physical, conceptual, or ritual, but whatever their manifestation, they serve to differentiate between the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Yi-fu Tuan develops an existentialist perspective when he emphasises the role of "anxiety" in the experience of place. He defines anxiety as "a diffuse sense of dread" that "presupposes an ability to anticipate...danger, when nothing in the immediate surroundings can be pinpointed as dangerous" (Yi-fu Tuan, 1979, p5). This commonly occurs in strange places, that do not provide the psychological supports of the familiar (cf. Chaguiboff et al, 1988). Yi-fu Tuan also proposes that the anxiety associated with the



unfamiliar is a product of a fertile human imagination; for example the fear of ghosts. Although our fears often originate from tangible dangers, we might well feel less anxious and more secure if we had less imagination. However, the comfort afforded by the familiar develops from our awareness of the mundaneness and stability of the home domain. Simply through experiencing survival and safety in a place we begin to feel secure in that place.

It would be unwise to overemphasise the significance of "familiarity" in respect to the elderly. However, it remains as a pertinent issue in the understanding of their home experience. From the analysis of participants' accounts, "familiarity" involves a number of issues. These are examined in turn in subsequent sections of this chapter.

The first is closely linked to the concept of "independence", discussed in Chapter 6. In this sense, "familiarity" relates to the knowledge and ability to negotiate the environment. Increasing frailty and deteriorating faculties can make the everyday process of getting on with life stressful for some older people, and contribute to a growing sense of vulnerability. This issue is central to the "environmental competence" model (Lawton, 1982). Arguably, such older people will tend to stay in a familiar environment, where they may

feel more in control, and to avoid unfamiliar places that might harbour hidden dangers. These dangers may not be actual, but the anticipation of harm may transform uncertainty into a more tangible fear.

A second theme defines "familiarity" in terms of temporal experience. One's relationship with a place is not just a matter of the here and now, but is built-up over time and exists as much in memories as in immediate experience. Thus, place experience has a quality of stability and continuity even in the face of considerable change. This contrast between experience and "actuality" is highlighted in the present chapter in a discussion of the ambivalence of home experience of some of the participants.

A third theme continues from the second and refers to the way participants interpret and describe their experiences of home. The experiential "reality" of familiarity is complex, but is often described in terms of a few powerful images that serve to orientate understanding and define actions. In particular, the metaphor of "roots" was used by a number of participants.

Finally, it is important to contextualise the issue of familiarity within the individual's wider aims and goals. For many older people, there is little actual

need for and older person to move from their home. Evidence has already been presented to indicate that there is a tendency for older people to be less inclined to actively develop their future, while it is conventional wisdom that it is the young who desire to break away from the constraints of the familiar.

#### FAMILIARITY AND COPING IN THE HOME ENVIRONMENT.

Actions are performed in the context of a physical environment that provides cues and structures to guide activity. Much of everyday life is a matter of carrying through routine activities in a familiar context: that is habitual action. In a familiar environment, even very complex actions are carried through without conscious attention, such as driving along a familiar route. Thus, person and environment are dynamically linked in the recall and enactment of actions. An implication of this is that in a familiar environment the memory load on the actor is reduced, and allows the person to devote more of their limited mental resources to other activities besides conscious remembering (Norman and Bobrow, 1976).

Meacham and Lieman (1981) discuss this in terms of "prospective remembering", emphasising the performance



of actions rather than the recall of information itself. The process of prospective remembering explicitly involves a dynamic system, in that performance can be guided not only in the given environment, but by cues arising from preceding activities (cf. Atkinson and Birch, 1970). This involves treating action from a goal perspective. It is insufficient to look at individual behaviours in themselves, but as complex actions or sequences that involve a structured progression towards some goal. Whatever the theoretical perspective, the physical context is important. Certainly, the achievement of some goal may present considerable difficulties to the actor, and the existence of environmental cues will be an essential part of performing the action. As Cole et al (1978) point out, in natural contexts, it is often impossible to separate the cognitive processes that are operating from the observable activities. In many cases, the subject is "operating on an environment that simultaneously operates on the subject...in a continuous process of interaction" (Cole et al, 1978).

Although the notion of prospective remembering would be an interesting perspective on the home experience of older people, the limits of the research project prevented the detailed observational study that would be needed to examine this issue. As already stated, many of the activities in the home exist at the

level of practical consciousness, and interviewing alone would be unlikely to uncover the complex person-environment relationships. However, the significance of the issue emerged when some participants mentioned that they felt secure and familiar in the place that they have lived for many years. A number of people mentioned that they knew their house so well that they could "find their way round in the dark". For example, one lady mentioned:

"I don't know what it is about this place. If I hear a noise at night, I can wander around without a light. It has a comfortable atmosphere. I walk in the dark. It doesn't bother me. I know where everything is. I can go upstairs to the bathroom and I never bother switching on the light" (20).

For this lady, home was a place that was known intimately. This knowledge seemed to highly valued, affording a feeling of security, as opposed to other places that were felt to be "strange" or threatening. It would be difficult to distinguish between the instrumental and personal dimensions of this aspect of the person-home relationship. A number of people said that they would not be worried about moving from their present homes even after living there many years. certainly, the issue of familiarity is not crucial to everyone. Moreover, for some people familiarity was

more of an emotional support rather than an instrumental necessity.

Is familiarity essential for these people to cope with their everyday lives at home? Would a person not become familiar with a new place after a short time? Are older people less able to adapt to new surroundings? Would it be the case that a new place would mean a disruption of habitual routines to the extent that the older person's actions would be continuously carried through at the conscious level of remembering? An ecological perspective (Murray, 1938; Lawton and Nahemow, 1973; Lawton, 1980) on this issue may be useful. This involves examining the relationship between the physiological and psychological competence of the individual and the demands that the home environment make on that individual. In certain situations, the demands would be in excess of the capabilities of the individual, while in other situations, individuals may have the capacity to adapt. One could argue that familiarity with the environment may be a significant aspect of competence, especially for those people whose competence may be declining. One participant in the study felt very strongly about this issue. He himself had been partially paralysed by a stroke, while his wife had had both legs amputated. He stressed that although life was difficult they had everything they needed close at hand. Familiarity with



the layout of the home helped to relieve the stress that was involved in living independently:

"We've been here that long now. It is as good as anywhere. We like it here, when you have lived in a place so long. We couldn't bear to shift. It's knowing where everything is that's important. We couldn't bear to shift. Not at our time of life...If I hadn't had the stroke we would have still enjoyed life. We would get the car out and go shopping and days out. We were doing marvellous till I had the stroke. I have managed to get myself a bit mobile. I can't walk far. I get about, just stumble about. We couldn't bear shifting now. We couldn't rise to the occasion. We have lived here too long. We would never get used to a new place would we. If things were arranged differently in a new place, we wouldn't get used to them, owing to our disabilities. We know where everything is. We couldn't bear to go hunting around for things in a new place. Everything is hopeless for a disabled person" (25)

Clearly, the thought of moving to a new dwelling was very disturbing to this individual. Without the knowledge, the habitual memory, of the familiar environment he felt that he would not be able to adapt to demands of a new environment. The relationship

between person and home that builds up over the years is largely at the level of practical consciousness. Acting in and on the dwelling over time provides people with a knowledge that can be both psychologically and instrumentally supportive to the individual. This is illustrated by a statement by Robert (56):

"The advantage of this house is that I can get around it easy. Everything is to my hand. The stairs. You see I cannot walk a great distance. I can only walk about 200 yards. On the flat yes, but not if it's hilly. In this house, I'm OK, every nick and corner I can walk on. But if I go anywhere else, I'm a bit dodgy. The carpets are different to the ones that are here, and I tend to dig my toes in them".

Robert has been disabled by a stroke and finds walking any distance both a physical effort and a trial of concentration. Yet at home, his familiarity with environment affords him confidence and relative independence. In his house he is a very active man, doing his own cleaning, washing and cooking. When Robert is walking he cannot look down or he loses his balance. He shuffles along, guiding himself by reaching out with his good hand. For Robert to walk unaided requires implicit knowledge of the floor and the layout of the rooms and furniture. If Robert were to move from his house, he may find that he can cope. However, the

confidence afforded by familiarity may also be a factor. Without this people may be unwilling to attempt to do things, possibly precluding them from becoming familiar with new environments after moving from their homes.

#### FAMILIARITY IN A CHANGING WORLD.

"Familiarity" is a word that has been used to describe the intimacy of the person-home relationship that builds up over time, and it has been suggested that this is an important factor behind the desire to "stay put". But how can familiarity be established and maintained in a world that is constantly changing? A striking aspect of some participant's accounts of home experience was their ambivalence concerning the benefits and disadvantages of their neighbourhood. In general, people were happy with their locality and valued their familiarity with the place and the people. For example:

I feel I belong in Heaton and that's all there is to it. It's always been home. It's not so much liking a place as having lived here all your life. You know people about the place. Everybody around here works at Parsons. You get to know so many people working there. Of course the neighbourhood has deteriorated very much. The people are not as



friendly. One gets older and young ones come in and they probably think 'she's an old fogey'. But most of the folks are nice. After you live in a place you get to know people...Yesterday I met a very old friend. I said 'hello Joe'. He was 90 last week. It's nice to meet people, old friends as it were. Most of the people have gone that I knew. They are mostly gone or moved away from this part of the country". (18)

This lady emphasised the length of time she had lived in the area and the friends and acquaintances that she had there. Yet even in this very positive view there are negative elements: the place has "deteriorated"; people are not as friendly. The ambivalence is most obvious in respect to knowing people. On the one hand she says "you get to know so many people", while on the other she admits that "most of the people have gone that I knew". This pattern was repeated in the accounts of many of the participants:

"Well, you know, I was born here, and after you have lived here all your life, you know most of the people. You see all round Scotswood, you lived with the people. You were like a family, one big family. You get close to them. The doors were never locked. You could just walk in and you were welcome. Through the day you could get scones and

tea. We used to have some good times; picnics in the field next to the Dene and a big band. Life wasn't dull. You can go to dances and that, Scotswood, Westerhope and that. Co-op halls, only 3/6 for going to them. I know every place. Well, it's not the same now; the people, habits. All strange people that come from town". (71)

Participants' accounts were sometimes entirely contradictory. In explaining why he preferred to stay put, one man said:

"I wouldn't like to move. I was born here. This place still suits me. It's got to. I've got nowhere else. I know the people around here after all this time. If you move away you know nobody". (19)

Yet he went on to say how much the area had changed and how few people he knew and that he felt like a "stranger in the street":

"Once upon a time I could have named everybody on the street. But that has changed now, well after 79 years. This place is as good as any. I would like to move for a change, but it would be difficult. I know all the ins and outs. I know all the places; familiar. But I don't know half

the folks. It used to be a nice street years ago; all strangers now. Back to 1914, everything was newer then. people were sociable then. In the good old days, people helped you. It's different now. Young people can't be bothered". (19)

This participant emphasised the contrast between the past and present. During his account he had admitted that he no longer knew most of the people around. But his original justification for staying put was that he did know the local people. It would seem that the past view still has implications for how the present is interpreted. It is perhaps not always possible to "forget" what a place has been in the past when one is evaluating the present, so that the Heaton or Scotswood of the past persists in the impressions of the Heaton and Scotswood of the present. This was true for many of the participants. For example:

"If you've been in an area any length of time you get accustomed to a place, passing the time there. There is a neighbourly atmosphere. If you move away you wouldn't know anyone. But now since so many people have moved away it is not the same. The wife's sister was next door. Two old ladies on the other side are moving away. The old chap across the street goes this weekend. Three people up the street have left. All the houses are empty.



I'm a stranger now over the last ten years. The whole street has changed. The people that are coming in are just young. But after getting used to it so long... You still see people you know, but it's not like the olden times. There's no spirit in the place. If you've moved to another place you wouldn't feel the same. You've been in an area for so long, it would be a wrench. It's a different feeling when you are young, moving about all the time. It's different when you are older. You get set." (72).

For this man, the major contrast was between the friendliness of the past and the increasing standoffishness of the present. A second issue in the contrast between past and present also emerged from this man's account. In the past, Scotswood was a pleasant place to live, but in recent times the place has become notorious for crime and social malaise. His views on this were again ambivalent. Firstly, he saw crime as fairly insignificant:

"Lovely people used to live around here. It's just deteriorated as years have gone on. But there's no real problems. We haven't had any. One or two break-ins and that. They don't bother us much" (72).

A second perspective contrasts with the first, and crime was seen by this participant as something that has great personal significance:

"The situation is getting beyond a joke. In the olden day you could go out quite comfortably and leave your doors open. It's like Fort Knox now. When you are out you are feeling 'is everything going to be alright, when we get home'? It's pretty rough" (72)

The apparent contradictions in people's accounts may reflect the problems that people have in interpreting the changes that they have experienced. Most people recognised the changes that had occurred over the years they had lived in a place, yet past impressions, images and interpretations remain intact. Although common, it would be wrong to say that this was universal. For example, one man had a more "realistic" view of his neighbourhood:

"I am satisfied here. I will see my days ended here. I am a bit tied like, with the wife being off-colour and myself not being too good. Losing your pals is hard. They are all getting old. All of them around here have been dying off like. You can't expect anything else. It makes it immaterial whether you live or not yourself. It takes the

spark out of life when you lose friends, especially when you know they are gone forever. It doesn't make much difference to the place, as far as my old life goes. It depends on your nature. People speak to me and I speak to them and I don't know who the hell they are like. One woman said that she hadn't seen me lately. It's still a friendly place, mostly. Some people are a bit gruff, so you don't bother with them" (2).

The issue of familiarity is clearly complex, and the temporal dimension makes it even harder to interpret. At an everyday level, familiarity with neighbourhood is taken for granted and even at a discursive level the term is used in a straightforward manner by participants. But how can people hold views that apparently contradict actual circumstances? A number of linked issues emerged from the analysis that may provide insights into this problem.

#### i. Memories of Place.

It has been shown in earlier chapters that memories are an important part of the home experience of many older people. For instance, the memories of a happy family life contribute to a happy "atmosphere" in the home. These relict aspects of home experience often outweigh



the "facts" of the present. This is the case for some widowed people who still feel close to their spouse or family when they are in their home. One could suppose that such impressions would persist until they were contradicted, but the examples in this section illustrate the potency of past impressions and memories in older people's evaluations of their neighbourhood. As Rowles (1978) argues, what an older person perceives may be very different from that of a younger person and that generally, geographical "lifespaces" are intensely personal.

ii. The Physical Place.

When talking about familiarity with place, most participants were concerned with the people they knew in the neighbourhood, rather than its physical attributes per se. This is interesting given that it was the physical environment that often provided the major basis of continuity of place. While people have come and gone in Scotswood and Heaton, both places have remained essentially unchanged in physical terms. It is suggested here that the physical place plays an important role in anchoring familiarity. The very mundaneness of the local environment fosters a feeling of familiarity in spite of change. The unchanging environment also serves to bring back memories and to reinforce relict impressions of place.

### iii. A Need for Familiarity.

The theoretical discussion of place familiarity emphasised a basic conservative tendency to "stay put". This may not be so much an actual preference for a familiar place, but a mistrust of the unfamiliar. Typically, people said that they would not know anybody in different place, reflecting a fear of being vulnerable and a belief that the familiar neighbourhood offers security and support. But in a sense people are misleading themselves with this belief. In objective terms, many people would receive little support from within the community. To illustrate:

"We just like being in it. It's just where it is. The atmosphere is alright with the neighbours. Unfortunately, I could not tell you half the names of the people here. being on the end, you never walk down the street to meet people. So we hardly know anyone really. We never really mixed a lot, with looking after my mother. We don't really know a lot of people. If we took ill, I don't know what we would do. The one's we did know are dead now" (11).

### iv. The Interpretation of Experience.

The interpretation of one's own experience is not straightforward, and the accounts in this section show that personal views of the world can be contradictory and "misleading". In trying to make sense of their place experience, people used terms such as "familiar" to describe extremely complex relationships. These powerful terms are not simply descriptive of experience, but in turn serve to define the direction of that experience. "Familiarity" is used to explain away a basic paradox of place experience. Although familiarity grows through living in a place, that familiarity is constantly being undermined by the changes that occur. But "familiarity" involves an almost inevitable logic: "if you live in a place for a long time, you get to know everyone". This argument may run counter to actual circumstances, but has important implications for how the world is viewed.

The significance of familiarity also depends upon the context in which the expression is used. In most cases, the use of familiarity was a defensive reaction to the possibility of moving: "I wouldn't know anybody in a new place". The logic is that in contrast with the unfamiliar places, the neighbourhood MUST be familiar. In other contexts, people may adopt a more "realistic" view that, in fact, the place has changed considerably over the years. The outcome of using the term



"familiar" is to BE familiar. The term is powerful and involves several entailments, such as knowledge, intimacy and at-easeness in a place. These entailments may prevail in everyday consciousness even though present circumstances warrant alternative interpretations.

## "ROOTS"

It is important to develop this last point further. "Familiarity" found its most common expression when people talked about having "roots", to describe a feeling of being "tied" to a place. This is a powerful metaphor, which encapsulates many of the facets of the person-home relationship as interpreted by the participants. In so doing, the metaphor in turn reinforces that relationship. Thus, the language that people use to interpret their everyday experiences is the key to understanding the nature of that experience.

"Rootedness" is not a novel concept in the phenomenology of place. Toffler (1971) suggests that the "notion of roots is taken to mean a fixed place, a permanently anchored 'home'". Seamon (1979) sees "rootedness" as the "power of home to organise the habitual, bodily stratum of the person's lived space.

Literally, the home roots the person spatially, providing a physical centre for departure and return". Weil (1955) and Coles (1970) argue that to have "roots" is a fundamental part of human nature, sustaining a need for stability and order that affords other basic needs. Although Sopher (1979) felt that "To be rooted is the property of vegetables", the metaphor was used spontaneously by a number of people to describe their relationship with their home. The term is complex and can convey a number of meanings. The basic usage is to express a feeling of being "tied" or "attached" to home through one's "roots" in the place:

"You get attached to your home. You get used to it. It would be like being uprooted. Some places you get to and you feel settled, and other places you feel as temporary and you leave it when something more suitable crops up. We like this place" (29).

The context for using the metaphor is important. In most cases, the concept of "rootedness" is used to assess the possible implications of moving house. To leave a place is to be "uprooted". In the last quote, the expression involved a sense of being unable to control the situation, where "being uprooted" is something that happens. However, one can also uproot oneself. The dominant term is expressed below:

"I would miss this house. It would be the tearing-up of roots. I would get used to it, there is always something to be thankful for" (7).

An individual may have to leave or may choose to do so, but the emphasis is on having to break the ties with the home, an act that is difficult, final and in some ways traumatic; to tear expresses violence and possible destruction. For this lady, to tear-up roots would be something that she could come to terms with. For others the implications seem less hopeful:

"Of course your home becomes more important when you are old. That's where your roots are. I have seen two or three people who have moved and they weren't long gone till one of them died. It depends on their circumstances. They might brood and not settle down; like shifting plants in the garden. With younger people, you are living your life, meeting new people and that. I have done all that. You see different people. You get disillusioned. You find freedom is not all it's cracked up to be. You just want to sit and watch the world go by, in a modicum of comfort. In America, they don't want to get old, but you have to don't you" (63).



The analogy between people and plants is obvious here. The implication is that being uprooted can have dire consequences. The ecological metaphor was not only used in this negative sense. Home was often seen in terms of a plant that has grown in a particular place, that has "roots" in that place. This concept was used by one participant to describe the growth of his family.

"If people are the same as me, they don't want to move away because they had a happy life, that's it. They can sit and think of things; happy times, bringing-up your family and that. This is the earth that you are building your family on. Same as the flowers outside, they are growing" (56).

The implication is that the home is the place where people grow up in the same way as flowers. They need a place that sustains them, where they grow up strong. The theme was continued by another participant who used the term "habitat":

"I don't know. People get walls around them. It's your habitat. Other people move around all the time. It depends on the person. This is the house I have worked for. Something you have achieved; your ambition. You hope you can enjoy it while your here" (24).

The exact meanings associated with "habitat" may not be entirely clear, but the main issue is that of the home as the most "natural" place for the person, where one attains a sort of "equilibrium", where everything that is needed to sustain the person exists within the home. The underlying image is that of the plant. Roots are something that are "put down", tying the plant to the earth. The person-place relationship has an ecological character; an organic relationship that develops over time, the earth sustaining the plant.

Although metaphor of "roots" was the most common expression of familiarity with place, there were many others used by participants. For instance, a common metaphor that was used was "anchored". As with "roots" the emphasis is upon the ties between person and place:

"It's like being anchored. Just the same as a ship, being anchored. Where could you go to at 85. You are tied to the place. You cannot run away. It takes you all your time to get into town nowadays, let alone move house. You could live with your family, but that's no good" (29).

The anchor metaphor perhaps conveys a stronger or more robust link between person and place than "roots". The image is one of safety and permanence, but it also suggests that it is a tie that cannot be broken. A

third metaphor was home as a "relation":

"Well, it's like a relation of yours. It's related to you. Some people live for years in one house, because it's like a relation. That applies to me. You know you can go out and go anywhere and you can always come back to your home" (71).

This is a subtle image and perhaps conveys two meanings. Firstly, through living in a place many years, the home takes on a particular significance for the dweller, to the extent that he relates to home as a "person". For instance, someone might greet their home after being away from it. A second meaning is that the home affords a sense of permanence and stability that is similar to the relationships between members of a family.

All these are examples of powerful images used by people to interpret their own everyday experience. In everyday language, metaphors are not just linguistic niceties, but are directly expressive of the qualities of human experience. To return to the "roots" metaphor, the analysis provides valuable insights into the relationship between the older person and home. A number of themes emerged:

i. Feelings of being rooted are linked to the length of



residence in a place. A person "puts down roots". Over time these become almost permanent. The roots serve to tie the individual to the place. The "roots" of an old person, who has lived in the same house for many years will be highly developed, to the extent that the person is part of the place and the place is part of the person.

ii. Rootedness implies that the individual is sustained by the qualities of the home. The "habitat" provides for one's needs, just as the soil nourishes and sustains the plant. The actual ways in which home sustains the individual is not obvious. Perhaps the way some older people value the memories associated with the home is important. For others, the locality may provide necessary instrumental supports, such as helpful neighbours.

iii. "Roots" are seen as fundamental to existence. Conversely, to be "uprooted" is a temporary situation. In time, the uprooted person will put down roots elsewhere. To be "rootless" is an unnatural, shiftless way of life. This may be important for elderly people. It has been shown that the imminence of death is a significant aspect of the consciousness of old age, and some older people may not feel that they would have time to put down 'roots' in a new place.

iv. To be uprooted is also a precarious position. Without roots, one may deteriorate. This seems to be an important image for older people, and has been illustrated above. An old person who moves away from their home is like a plant that is uprooted. In many cases, the plant will wither and die. To be uprooted is also seen to be more traumatic for an older person than younger people. The "roots" of an old person are more significant, tying the individual to a place. The less well-developed roots of a younger person mean that moving is less of an upheaval. The young plant will survive the move and will establish roots elsewhere.

v. The image of the plant growing in the earth implies that the person-place relationship needs to be cultivated. The relationship can be delicate and requires a great deal of care. Some plants are delicate, while others are hardy, where the former requires particular attention and careful tending.

vi. For the elderly, there is a fear that one may have to move unwillingly. Being "uprooted" expresses this situation; the plant is uprooted by force, it has no control over the situation.

All these are possible meanings that can be implied by the metaphor. Everyday usage of the term will involve one or more of these meanings, depending on the

understanding of the individual and the expressive context.

The significance of metaphors, however, goes even further than expression. The imagery is part of "reality" for an individual and has implications for human action (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980b). At one level, metaphors serve to define our consciousness of the world. "Roots" or "anchored" reflect the close relationship that can develop between person and place, making concrete a complex relationship in terms of one that is readily appreciated. At another level, a metaphor provides a framework for understanding how the world works. For example, roots sustain growth and well-being and are necessary to well-being. Finally, metaphor has implications for behaviour. By making sense of their situation through the use of the "roots" metaphor, a person has already begun to define the opportunities and constraints within which they live and act. The use of the term "roots" expresses the strong bond between person and place that can develop over the years and also serves to reinforce that bond in the individual's consciousness. Certainly, the people who emphasized "roots" had lived in their homes for many years and had no intentions of moving. Conversely, being "uprooted" can have negative associations in the minds of some elderly people. These negative meanings are reflected in the wariness that they have in respect



to moving house. Whatever the specific meaning, the "roots" metaphor, together with the others that have been discussed, serve to orientate the users of these expressions towards staying put.

#### HOME AND THE END OF LIFE.

Familiarity with the home environment is an important factor contributing to the tendency to stay put. However, it is necessary to examine the role of place familiarity within the wider context of the lives of older individuals, in particular their motivations, long term goals and objectives. It has already been suggested in Chapter 9., that many participants felt that there was no point in moving, because they were aware they were coming to the end of their lives. This awareness seemed to foster a preference for the familiar; if one moved there would be too little time to settle down and get to know the new place.

A number of authors (Cottle and Klineberg, 1974; Ward, 1979; Lieberman and Tobin, 1983) suggest that a sense of impending death is a central feature of the psychology of old age, underlying processes such as social and emotional disengagement (Cumming and Henry, 1961) and the tendency to engage in life review (Butler,

1963). A perceptive interpretation of the personal significance of the end of life is provided by Simone de Beauvoir, who argues that the perception of the future is relative to one's stage of life. As she puts it:

"The young people of today early realize that society has prefabricated their future, but many dream of escaping from the system or even of destroying it, and this leaves a wide field open to their imagination. At some given moment...the individual is under obligation to reproduce his life: he is the prisoner of his calling and he sees his world draw in, his projects grow fewer in number. Nevertheless, the grown man still has years enough before him to make up his mind to act...he peoples the future with his hopes- a future whose end he does not yet see. The old person, for his part, knows that his life is accomplished and that he will never refashion it. The future is no longer big with promise: both this future and the being that must live it contract together" (de Beauvoir, 1977, 420)

She goes on to quote Michel Leiris:

"As I saw it, this ending of life was rather like the last days of my stay in Florence. We had 'done' the Tuscan capital from top to bottom, and

all we had left to see was a few trifles: in just the same way I had only a few trifles left to do in the time that still remained for me to live...When one no longer looks upon being wiped out by death or senility as a fate but expects it as an evil that is about to strike, then...one loses even the smallest wish to undertake any new thing: one reckons the very small amount of time that still lies ahead- a throttled time that has no relation with that of the days when it was unthinkable that any undertaking should not have space enough to develop freely; and this puts out one's fire entirely". (de Beauvoir, 1977, 421-422).

A contradictory view is provided by Morton Piner (1978) who emphasises that creativity and pursuing new objectives is not restricted to the young. He cites numerous cases of achievements by "old" people in artistic, scientific, political and educational fields among others. Nevertheless, most theories of ageing suggest an increased psychological restriction in old age. For example, Lowenthal et al (1976) note that older people are less growth oriented than younger people, seeking a relatively restricted lifestyle.

Similar interpretations can be found elsewhere. For example, Erikson (1968) described old age in terms of "integrity versus despair", and as the fruition of



earlier life stages. The recognition that one only has "so much time left" is common amongst older individuals (cf. Neugarten, 1967), forcing one to deal with the meaningfulness of one's life. For Erikson, time is too short to "attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity". Thus, old age is not seen so much a time of action, but as a final inner struggle between "integrity" and "despair". As Kimmel (1980) points out, this argument is similar to the existential perspective, where death is the ultimate reality that lends individual existence reality and meaning. The imminence of death is a reality facing older people, but the outcome is not necessarily a time of personal crisis. Indeed the evidence of most studies into attitudes towards death suggest the contrary (Lieberman and Coplan, 1970), that most people who would be classed as "old" have come to terms with death. A conclusion of most research is that older people are less likely to be afraid of death than are middle-aged people (Kalish, 1976; Kalish and Reynolds, 1976; Bengtson et al, 1977).

So what are the everyday implications of the imminence of death? Psychologically, the effects are likely to vary considerably between individuals, depending upon their own personalities, attitudes and circumstances. However, a common denominator is that an awareness of the end of life is a fundamental part of

the consciousness of older people. This is not to suggest that all older people are obsessed with the thought of death. Nevertheless, their practical consciousness, the tacit knowledge that is applied to the way actions are conducted (Giddens, 1979), involves an awareness of death. In particular, the formulation and carrying through of longer-term plans may be perceived to be futile. The basic limitation of time on the capacity to undertake a longer-term action may be a significant practical consideration.

These issues were examined empirically by asking participants about their hopes and plans for the future. The answers they gave are summarized in Table 9.1. By far the most common reaction was that the future had very little in store. For example:

"What does the future have in store? Not much- the graveyard. You cannot say you have a future when you are over eighty. You can never say whether you have five years or five minutes. Life is just what you make of it" (29).

This sentiment was echoed by over a third of the participants. The meaning is clear: the future is limited, death is something that could occur at any time, so there is little point in embarking on new long-term projects; one just has to take what fate has

Table 9.1 Hopes and plans for the future.

Category	Observation	No. of mentions
Maintaining the present	Carry on the way I have done	5
	Go on living as healthily as possible	2
	Keep going until last moment	4
	Take life as it comes	1
	Keep things as they are	2
	Live as long as I can	4
	Just enjoy ourselves	2
	Make best of things	2
	Lads keep coming to see me	1
No prospects	What future?	8
	No prospects	9
	What plans can you have at this age?	4
	Just the daily routine	1
	Reminisce (nothing to look forward to)	1
Fear of dependency	Go peacefully	1
	To live in my own house	2
	No to go into old folks home	2
	As long as I can get about	2
	Couldn't cope with change	1
	Worried about the way it will end	1
	Hate to be dependent	1
Specific objectives	Move to where friends live	1
	Like to go abroad	1
	Take up evening classes	1
	Like my knees put right	2
	Win pools	1
Negative	Lonely	1
	Cannot get out	1
	No money	1
	Can't hurry up	1
	Scared to leave home	2
	Had a bad deal	1
Concern for family	Hope children are OK	8
	Hope for country/world	2



in store. This attitude in itself does not imply morbid feelings. Most of the participants were matter-of-fact about their situations:

"Well, nothing really. I have no real plans for the future. Just to keep going until I die. I couldn't honestly say that I don't care if anything happens to me, but I must not be ready to die yet. But I talk about what's going to happen and that" (64).

This statement leads on to a second issue. If the objectives of life are constrained by a limited future, then one is left with the present and the past:

"The future doesn't hold much for older people. You tend to remember the past. They were better days than these. I am in fairly good health and getting on has not made much difference to me. You just have to look for little things to occupy your mind and that. You can get out. I've got a bus pass".

Popular images and a great deal of academic work have emphasised the significance of the past for older people (eg. Butler, 1963), and the issue of remembering was examined in the last chapter. Although undoubtedly important, it would be unwise to overemphasise the

relevance of the past. Indeed, participants were mainly concerned with their situations in the present. This was not entirely divorced from a vision of the future. Participants did have objectives and hopes for the future, but these were primarily a matter of extending their present situations for as long as possible; just to go on "...living life as I am doing now" (75). This has a number of facets. One objective was to live as long as possible. But a further essential quality is good health:

"I never admit to being old. It's only a figure. The only sign of old age is a bit of lumbago. I've been very fortunate in that I have had good health. I just hope to be able to carry on the way I have done all my life. Right up to the last moment- and then I am not going to go" (3).

For many people there was the spectre of dependency. Poor health, the inability to get about, were fears that were expressed in many of the interviews. It would seem that the future is limited to two directions: the present maintained or dependency.

It would be wrong to suggest that elderly people have no objectives beyond the "daily routine". However, specific objectives did not figure prominently during the interviews. Besides hoping to win the pools and

miscellaneous plans such as taking up evening classes, there were few consistent concerns. Two people were hoping to have operations on their knees so that they could be mobile again. But the main concern for the future lay with participants' children:

"There's not much in the future for us. Just as long as the son and daughter are alright. That's what keeps us alive. We don't do much. We go to the day unit at Walker Hospital on a Wednesday. One day, that's all. We are just thankful for the son and daughter" (25).

This sort of comment was common. This is largely a matter of parental concern for the well-being of children and grandchildren, but perhaps it is also a matter of their children's future being their only future. The significance of the family can be seen in the attitudes of people who feel that they are not close enough to their children:

"Well, I have no prospects really. Just as long as I can keep going. I have had a bad deal. I can't hurry up like I used to. I have got relatives I never see. I never see anybody. I could kick the bucket and nobody would know. I've got a daughter who works in the school just around the corner, but she never bothers to call. She's frightened that



I'll want something" (19).

Such bitterness was not common amongst participants. Indeed very few people complained about their situations. Although well-publicised problems such as loneliness, poor health, lack of money, and fear of going out were mentioned, these were marginal concerns overall. Whether or not this is an accurate representation of the reality of old age is open to question. Were participants generally giving accounts that overstated the good aspects of life as opposed to the negative side of things? Overwhelmingly, the PGC morale scale indicated that participants had come to terms with their own ageing, did not show high levels of anxiety, and were satisfied with the social and family contacts they had. Typical attitudes were simply to make the "best of things", "just enjoy ourselves", and to "take life as it comes".

Of course individual reactions to given situations are likely to be complex and will vary considerably. However, it is argued that the awareness that one is at the end of life has implications for the way older people define their lives. It has been suggested that this awareness may direct people away from undertaking longer-term actions. The relationship between person and home should be seen in this context. For example, the process of finding and moving to a new place is a

process that can extend over a considerable time. But perhaps more significant would be the need to embark upon a radical revision of one's life; the need to establish new patterns of living, new contacts, getting used to new places and people represents the kind of upheaval in both material and symbolic terms, that was often abhorrent to participants. Equally, the emphasis of this period of life is to maintain the present situation for as long as possible. In environmental terms, the general outcome is a preference for the familiarity of the home a place that is intimate, that affords a sense of stability and security. This was often expressed as being a "final refuge":

"Well, it's that people have come to the end of their life and don't want to start a new one. When you get to that stage, you just sort of think that there is no point in moving" (79).

"The trouble with moving is being sure of getting a good place and making friends in a new place. The trouble is though, is that you haven't the time to make real friends properly or settle down if you are already old" (32).

## Chapter 10

CONCLUSION.



## SUMMARY OF EMERGING ISSUES.

The objective behind the present research was to examine the role of home environments within the lives of older people. From a phenomenological perspective, the emphasis was very much on providing a conceptual framework for understanding this relationship, rather than to develop an elaborate model of person-environment interaction. The research was aimed at identifying and exploring the key issues that characterize home experience in later life. This section of the chapter is devoted to a summary of the main themes to emerge from the research. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical implications of the findings for the understanding of human environmental experience in general.

The starting-point of the empirical investigation was the content analysis of participants' meanings of home in Chapter 4. A characteristically complex picture of home experience emerged. Most people mentioned a number of attributes when asked to define what home meant to them, while there were also considerable individual differences between people. Despite this it was possible to identify consistent themes within their accounts. On the basis of the content analysis, twenty-five meaning categories were defined, such as

"family", "comfort", and "privacy", which broadly coincide with other studies of people's conceptualisations of home.

The specific meanings used by participants reflect more fundamental dimensions of home experience, focussing on family/ comfort, arrange place/ownership, objects/self and privacy/return. The role of the dweller also emerged as central to the experience of home, emphasising that "home" is a transaction between person and place. There were clear variations in usage of certain meaning categories between the three groups in the study (over 65's, younger employed, and younger unemployed). Some meanings were common to all three groups, including: "comfort", "family", "do what you want" and "it's what you make it. Other meanings were particularly associated with the elderly, such as "memories", "privacy", and "good neighbours". Other meanings, notably "self" and "possessions", were absent from the accounts of older participants.

A number of themes emerged from the analysis in Chapter 4 that were pertinent to the investigation of the relationship between home and old age. Firstly, older people tended to be concerned with the introspective aspects of home experience, such as "privacy", indicating that they are often "inwards-looking" in terms of their environmental

orientation, and that their lives are more "focused" on their homes. Secondly, older participants stressed the instrumental aspects of their home and neighbourhood, and for many "independence" was central to their experience of home. Finally, older participants tended to be more attached to their homes, often emphasising the memories associated with the place. These three themes, home focus, independence and attachment, were seen as central to the understanding of home experience in later life and were explored in turn in subsequent chapters.

#### Home focus.

Home focus refers to a general tendency for home to take on greater significance in later life. A common image of the elderly is that of an inexorable spatial constriction, with a concomitant increase in the significance of the home environment. Although simplistic, participants' place usage supports this view at a general level. In comparison with younger groups, the elderly had a more restricted geographical range, had a smaller repertoire of places and spent less time outside the house. The great majority (80%) of the elderly participants themselves admitted that home does become more important in later life. They suggested a number of possible reasons for this.



i. The interests and activities of some older people become centred on the home.

ii. Many older people simply spend more time at home due to: fewer non-home places catering for the elderly; lack of money; increasing physical frailty; a positive preference for the home as opposed to other places.

iii. One's home is perceived to be something that is solid, which affords a sense of permanence and security in later life.

iv. Home is also a place of refuge and privacy. The seclusion of the home was preferred by a number of the elderly participants.

v. As older people face the reality or possibility of increasing frailty, the home is seen as a source of independence and personal control.

vi. Many older people felt that they had grown more attached to their homes in later life.

In some ways, "home focus" can be seen as a form of "spatial disengagement" in that a decreasing social lifespace is paralleled by a decreasing spatial range. Although this is often a product of circumstances and constraints, home focus should not be construed deterministically, and it is important to stress the role of individuals in defining their own situations. Case studies were valuable in developing this issue by placing people's environmental experience within their

biographical contexts. Participants' accounts of their lives showed that they had had to reorientate their lives in some way. Often this is a response to traumatic life events, while for others later life is characterised by a gradual reorientation. In the present context, the interesting issue is that changes in one's life in general and changes in one's environmental experience go hand in hand. This is not just a matter of environmental constraint. The home can be used as a resource for coping with later life. The home can be a basis for new interests and activities and can be a source of emotional support. In this sense, the home presents opportunities for developing one's life in a positive way and certainly, the preference for the home environment was very prevalent amongst participants.

### Independence.

"Independence" was a recurrent theme in participants' accounts of their home experience. Although used freely both by the elderly themselves, academics and welfare professionals, the term is not well understood. A conceptual analysis showed that independence is a complex term that has a number of meanings: not being physically dependent; self-direction or control; and the absence of feelings of obligation. In natural

discourse, the specific meaning depends on the context in which it is being used. It is also important to view independence in subjective and symbolic terms rather than as an objective state. The emphasis on "being independent" was very strong amongst participants and some participants valued their independence despite being highly dependent on objective criteria. The actuality or possibility of losing one's independence, whatever the definition, serves to make the maintenance of independence a primary concern.

Being independent, despite its subjective connotations, must have some basis in actuality. The home is a crucial material context for being independent in all its modes, by providing a physical boundary between the individual and others, and thereby defining a space that is uniquely the domain of that individual. The perceived significance of this role will depend on the individual concerned. An increasing awareness of the possibility of losing independence brings into the foreground the value of the home as a place where independence can be preserved. Two case studies illustrated the great emphasis placed on the home as a source of independence. For one disabled person, home was shown to contribute to some extent to maintaining his physical capacities and independence. For another, having one's own home was a means for regaining personal control in the face of increasing physical dependence.



But it is the symbolic quality of the home-independence relationship that is the prime consideration. The home is a symbol of the individual in that it is an expression of identity to others, and as a personal confirmation of the self as distinct from others. Home is an important symbol of one's individuality, and to remain in one's own home is to assert one's independence and identity. Conversely, to move to supportive environments, such as a residential or nursing home is often taken to symbolise the loss of "independence" and the onset of "social death".

#### Attachment to home.

The study showed that most of the participants had no desire to leave their present homes and had never even considered a move. A number of reasons were given for why people wished to stay put, including: dislike of upheaval; fear of the unknown; expense; preference for the present home; lack of suitable alternatives; lack of reasons for moving; a feeling that the present home was their "final home".

There was a smaller group of people who said that they would not mind moving, although they often had no opportunity to do so, because of lack of money or suitable alternative. These participants usually had

few feelings of attachment for their present homes, or expressed negative views about their living conditions. Some had aspirations to move somewhere better or had a specific objective in mind, such as a move to sheltered housing. However, even amongst these people, there was some ambivalence over moving, indicating that decisions to move will entail some degree of regret.

Although the person-home relationship is complex and individualistic, the research supports the common assumption that older people tend to be attached to their homes. This attachment has a number of dimensions, which were explored in subsequent chapters of the thesis.

- i. The memories associated with the home were of prime importance to some participants.
- ii. People felt secure in the familiar environment of their home and neighbourhood.
- iii. A number of people expressed their relationship with the home environment in terms of being rooted.
- iv. The belief that one has come to the end of life can be accompanied by a desire to stay in one's "final home".

## Memories and home.

The exploration of the nature and the role of memories in the home experience of older people began from a theoretical discussion of the nature of remembering in everyday life. Two modes of remembering were identified. Firstly, reminiscence was defined as the conscious recall of the past. Reminiscence has been the focus of a good deal of gerontological theory and is usually seen as a way of coming to terms with the life circumstances of growing old. The notion of remembering as a coping process perhaps fails to capture the full significance of memories for older people. This observation prompted a discussion of spontaneous remembering, where the emphasis is not upon conscious recall, but upon involuntary images and memories that may vividly recreate past events in the present. The home environment may play an important part in the process of remembering, whatever its precise nature. This relationship has a number of facets:

- i. Memories OF the home- as a scene of family life and important life events, the home may constitute much of the substance of a person's memories. This is particularly significant for the elderly. Bereavement, or the moving away of children adds poignancy to the recollections of one's past life.



ii. Memories BY the home- the house, its rooms and objects may evoke memories of the past. Personal objects are the focus of conscious reminiscence, while the physical environment also provides cues for spontaneous remembering. To a degree, memories and the process of remembering are "tied" to the house, as cues may be location-specific. The evocation of the past can be very strong, to the extent that some people people feel the "presence" of a deceased spouse when they are in the house.

iii. Home as the place FOR remembering- the home is seen to play a role in preserving memories. Some people place a great deal of significance on this role, often saying that their home is all they have left. The home is an important means for maintaining continuity with a valued past and people may wish to keep the house as it was in the past. To leave or change the home is to break an important link with the past. The home is also a place in which remembering takes place, for example, particular locations in the home may afford revery and recollection of the past.

#### Familiarity with the Home Environment.

A person's home or neighbourhood may places that they

have known for a long time. To leave such a "familiar" place may involve leaving behind family, friends as well as a valued locale and house. Conversely, people are often apprehensive about having to move to an unfamiliar place. This attitude perhaps reflects a basic need for security, stability and order, a need which is fulfilled by one's "home". This need for security implies a conservative impulse within place experience. There are other impulses, such as the desire for adventure and novelty. However, within the present study, older participants emphasised a desire to "stay put" and were often apprehensive of moving to a new place. Place familiarity in later life has two dimensions: security and temporal experience.

Firstly, increasing frailty and deteriorating faculties in old age may make everyday life a stressful process. Some participants mentioned that they felt secure in their homes because they knew their houses intimately. Acting in and on the dwelling over time provides people with a habitual memory of the place that can be both psychologically and instrumentally supportive. Without this knowledge of the familiar environment, people may feel vulnerable. Familiarity is particularly significant for those who are less physically competent. In one case, an intimate knowledge of room layouts and floor surfaces was an essential part of remaining instrumentally independent.

A second theme defines "familiarity" in terms of temporal experience. Home experience does not just comprise perceptions of the present, but also memories of a place. These relict impressions may outweigh the "reality" of the present. For instance, memories of a happy family life may still contribute to a happy home "atmosphere" even when a person lives alone. The physical place plays an important role in anchoring familiarity. The mundaneness of a relatively slow-changing physical environment fosters a feeling of familiarity, in spite of considerable social change. In a sense, familiarity can be illusory. For example, a number of participants said that they knew everybody in their neighbourhood, despite the loss of most of their social contacts. Older people may find it difficult to reconcile potent images of the past with changed present circumstances

### Rootedness.

People interpret their situations. In trying to resolve the often contradictory strands of their place experiences, they use terms such as "familiar" to describe extremely complex situations. These terms are not simply descriptive, but in turn define the experience of place. "Familiarity" has a particular



logic: to live in a place for a long time is seen to afford familiarity and implies entailments of knowledge, intimacy and at-easeness. This interpretation may even run counter to actual circumstances, such as continual change in the neighbourhood. The outcome of using the term "familiar" is to BE familiar, and emphasises the role of language and imagery in defining "reality" for an individual.

Familiarity with home found its most common expression when participants talked about having "roots" in a place. "Rootedness" is a metaphor which likens human existence to that of plants. Participants' usage of the term involved a number of dimensions:

- i. Being rooted is linked to length of residence. People "put down roots", which over time are seen to become almost permanent.
- ii. The place where one has roots nourishes and sustains the individual and is therefore fundamental to existence.
- iii. The person-home relationship requires careful "cultivation" and care if the individual is to flourish.
- iv. The necessity of having roots implies that to be rootless is unnatural.

v. To move from one's home is to be "uprooted". This is to be in a precarious situation, as the person will eventually wither and die if they cannot put down roots elsewhere.

vi. Being uprooted implies being removed by force with no control over the situation.

The imagery of "roots" defines the way people think about and act in the world. For example, some people felt that they were too old to move and have time to put "roots" down elsewhere. Some felt that if old people are "uprooted" they will invariably deteriorate and die. These are powerful images that contribute to the desire to stay put.

#### Home and the End of Life.

A number of participants felt that they were approaching the end of life. A sense of approaching death has implications for the psychology of old age. For example, long-term plans may be seen to be futile. Many of the participants expressed this view, suggesting that death could occur at any time and that there was little point in undertaking new projects. For some the major objective in life was to extend the present situation

for as long as possible; to live as long as possible and to avoid becoming dependent. For others, the main concern for the future lay with children. Although participants saw the future as limited, most were reconciled to their situations and expressed that they were simply concerned with making the "best of things".

The relationship between person and home should be seen in this wider life context. The awareness of impending death has implications for a person's attitude towards their home. Moving to a new place could be a process that extends over a considerable time, while it would also involve a radical reorientation of one's life. This kind of upheaval was abhorrent to many of the participants. Although there are considerable individual differences, in later life the tendency is to maintain the present. In environmental terms, this fosters a preference for the familiar, secure and stable environment of the home.

#### THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

The research presented in this thesis has been aimed at outlining and elucidating the major dimensions within which individual experience of home in later life is situated. The individual chapters and the summary in



the last section have fulfilled this task and there is no need to develop the empirical themes further. Rather, in this section, attention is given to the theoretical implications of the research for understanding environmental and geographical experience at a more general level. In this context it is important to point to three emergent themes.

The first theme focuses on the temporality of home experience. Home is not something that is "in" the environment, nor is it some kind of idealistic notion on the part of the dweller. Throughout the discussion, the emphasis has been on the home as a transaction between person and place in terms of the affordance structure within home experience. This perspective requires an investigation into both how the individual's wider lifeworld impinges upon the experience of home, and how home experience in turn bears upon this wider experience. The characteristic picture that emerged from the research involved a duality of continuity and change. Most people had lived in their homes for many years and the home was a medium for continuity in their lives, for example through memories. Conversely, most of the participants had had to come to terms with actual or potential changes in their later lives, such as life crises, the possibility of dependence, and the imminence of death. In reorienting their lives in the face of these circumstances, they reorientate their home

experience, both behaviourally and cognitively. The temporality that characterizes ageing and home experience can be summarised as follows:

i. The past. Individuals have a sense of having a history. The past, in terms of personal experiences, has implications for home experience through memories and familiarity.

ii. The present. Individuals have to cope with the life changes that characterize later life. The home represents an important resource for coping and many older people believe that the home takes on a greater personal significance.

iii. The future. The awareness of death or the possibility of physical dependency lends considerable symbolic value to the home. For many older people, the home is a means of preserving their independence, individuality and identity in the face of a threatening future.

A second theme relates to the coming into consciousness of the personal significance of home. One could suggest that in many ways the relationship between person and place is the same for both younger people and for older people. For example, the "memories" category was uniquely associated with elderly respondents. Does

this mean that younger people have no memories associated with their home? Of course not, it is rather a matter of becoming aware of, and expressing, the significance of memories in relation to the home, a tendency which was characteristic of the older participants. As one person put it, "you only realise how important your home is when you are older". The inference from this is that home experience is a duality. On the one hand, there are those aspects of which we are heedful and others which are habitual or immediately forgotten. Natsoulas (1983) provides insight into why this occurs by referring to the distinction between being aware and being conscious of being aware. Although this reflexivity is characteristic of human consciousness, it is not pervasive:

"...awarenesses of the environment do occur when habitual behaviors are produced, but there is less utility in becoming conscious of such awarenesses, as compared to the awarenesses involved when we are uncertain concerning how to respond" (Natsoulas, 1983, 37).

The coming-into-consciousness of home is related to the first theme of experiential temporality. Old age is characterized by actual or potential life changes in life circumstances and the awareness of finitude. It is



in the context of these changes that a person becomes aware of their situation and the need to respond. This in turn makes conspicuous the role of home within one's life and its potential value in responding to change.

A third theme follows on from the previous two and focuses on the role of language in framing environmental experience. During interviews with participants, the present researcher became aware of a distinction between home as it is experienced and home as it is described. In many respects, home is something that is taken for granted, it is something that is just used without reflection. Looking back on research and the individuals concerned, the present author is confronted with a feeling of having failed to capture much of the richness of the individual experience that had seemed manifest at the time. Much of that experience seemed to remain inexpressible. Yet despite this, the way people conceived and expressed their relationship with home was remarkably consistent. For example, it was possible to condense accounts into a small number (25) of meaning categories, and still preserve semantic integrity. In terms of understanding the experience of home, this distinction between the expressible and inexpressible is an important one and deserves further consideration.

Geolinguistics: Everyday Language and the Understanding

## of Geographical Experience.

The expressive domain of environmental experience is an issue which has received little explicit attention in the literature on person-environment relations (cf. Teymur, 1982 as an exception). How people describe their homes and neighbourhoods is not something that can be taken at face value. The present research mainly consisted of a systematic analysis of participant's discourse, where the aim was to explicate as precisely as possible the meanings that underlie commonsense notions such as "home". As the research progressed, it became evident that the way people talked about their homes was not simply descriptive, but also constitutive, of their environmental experience. For instance, the use of metaphors such as "roots" involved a view of person-place interaction that served to define the possibilities for future actions.

The idea that language structures the way we think about the world and act in it was developed by Wittgenstein in his Philosophical Investigations (1958). He argues that language should not be seen as directly representative of an absolute reality (a picture), but as a "tool". People actively use language to shape their lives and to achieve some objective. Indeed, Wittgenstein uses the term "language game" as a metaphor for communication. As a game, language is primarily a

social activity which is rule-governed. One should not look for an absolute meaning behind words, but at the rules of the game; the way in which words are used in the context of a particular situation. The significance of this is illustrated by the way people use the term "independence". As shown in Chapter 6, "independence" has no single meaning and is largely symbolic rather than an actual state of being; we are all "dependent" to some extent. Independence emerges as an issue in home experience only within the context of "old age". To understand "independence" requires an understanding of the role it plays within people's lives.

For Wittgenstein, language permeates all thought and experience. From this perspective it is possible to link the role of the home to the key concept of the life review in old age. The life review can be seen as a coming-into-consciousness of personally valued events in the past in the context of being aware of impending death. But more than that, it is an interpretation or evaluation of one's life situation as a whole. This is a linguistic thing, it is a matter of self-monitoring and self-evaluation. It is in this context that the home emerges as a focus of concern.

Further insight into the role of language can be found in concepts developed by Gubrium (1986, 1987) in his examination of people's accounts of Alzheimer's



disease. He argues that both popular and academic publications on dementia provide an ambiguous image of the course of the disease. Dementia is usually presented as having a developmental structure, such as stages of debilitation, yet it is at the same time seen to be idiosyncratic with no clear-cut pattern. This simultaneity of structure and disarray is also apparent in people's accounts of caring for relatives with dementia. The key to understanding these multiple "realities" lies in communicative usage, that is communication as an activity rather than as a description or representation of an absolute world. As an activity, communication relates to the purposes and intentions of the communicator, rather than to conceptual consistency or truth. Gubrium distinguishes between two modes of communicative usage. Firstly, amelioration refers to a person's attempts to do something about what is happening, and language is used to structure experience for the purposes of action. Conversely, tribulation refers to a person's frustration over the inability to intervene, and accounts involve the destructuring of experience, which in turn fosters inaction.

An interesting aspect of Gubrium's research is that it demonstrates that people are able to hold views of their world that are contradictory. Expression and consciousness are not bound by a rule of consistency or

by an absolute reality, but are situated within the wider objectives of the individual. This perspective helps one to understand the inconsistencies that occurred in some participants' accounts of their home experience. The people who valued their home as a familiar place, while at the same time felt they were "strangers on the street", can be interpreted as having two geographical "realities". This may reflect the themes of continuity and change within the older person's lifeworld; themes which may themselves be difficult to reconcile. Which particular reality is operating depends on the communicative context within which it is framed. For example, a latent fear of losing one's home in later life may surface as an increased emphasis on the positive aspects of the home, when one is faced with this possibility. The communicative context could be discussions with friends or relatives, visits by social workers or health carers, questions by researchers, or the individual's own inner reflections, all of which may serve to highlight moving as a possible option. Other contexts, such as discussions with neighbours about the changes in the locality, may bring about a focus on negative attributes; such as the common "it wasn't like this in my day" attitude.

In many ways, the expressive dimension of geographical experience can be seen to be a process of

justification, to both oneself and to others. For instance, the psychological investment in a place through living there for many years may lead a person to overlook negative attributes of that place, such as a deteriorating physical fabric, and to talk about positive aspects such as a sense of community. In a very real sense, people tend to make the best of their situations. In most cases, participants had neither the need or opportunity to move elsewhere, and the process of justification can be seen as an adaptive strategy. The case of Robert is illustrative on this point. Unusually, he was faced with two possible futures: to stay in his present home or to move to an old person's bungalow. Whichever option he took could be justified as the "best" decision. In respect to staying put, he emphasised the memories associated with his home and the independence that the place afforded him. In respect to moving he emphasised his belief that the moral tone of the neighbourhood had deteriorated and that an old person's bungalow was more appropriate to his physical capacities.

#### The Geographical Background.

In contrast to the expressive domain, much of geographical experience operates below conscious



awareness, at a level of practical consciousness (Giddens, 1979). A number of issues raised in the present research support this view. For example, "familiarity" is a catch-all term used to articulate a vague feeling of intimacy with a place. Exactly what constitutes this intimacy is largely inexpressible, and represents the individual's habitual, natural attitude towards the world. At this level of geographical experience, analysis needs to be concerned with the practices of everyday life, rather than the conscious concerns of the individual, and there is a need to develop an appropriate analytical framework.

Again, some of the concepts developed by Wittgenstein may be useful in this respect. Although his work emphasises the role of language in structuring experience, there are aspects in his later philosophy (1969), which suggest that much of human experience takes place at a more fundamental level. John Searle (1983), developing some of the ideas of Wittgenstein, in making a distinction between intentional and preintentional mental states, argues that much of our lives take place at a level that is not directly conscious. Moreover, he suggests that many mental states are non-representational; a view that contradicts the mainstream Western philosophy view that all meaningful activities are a product of some inner theory. Searle's position is that although mental

representations are determinants of some behaviour, underneath these representations is a "bedrock" of capacities, such as skills, stances, habits and practices that are preintentional in nature. For example, one does not need a walking rule in order to walk, one just walks. There is no need for an internal theory in order to behave in this way, "we just act", as Searle puts it. Searle develops the concept of the Background to describe these habitual and primitive capacities. He defines the Background as a:

"... a set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable all representing to take place. Intentional states only have the conditions of satisfaction that they do, and thus only are the states that they are, against a Background of abilities that are not themselves Intentional states. In order that I can now have the Intentional states that I do I must have certain kinds of know-how: I must know how things are and I must know how to do things, but the kinds of 'know-how' in question are not, in these cases, forms of 'knowing-that'" (Searle, 1983, 143).

In this sense, Searle is expressing a concept of direct experience that is similar to Gibson's (1979) notion of affordances (see Chapter 2). Rather than framing behaviour entirely in terms of complex inner theories and representations, one should see that a

great deal of behaviour is at the level of animal reactions and direct perception. Searle illustrates his point by referring to how people learn to ski. The traditional cognitivist view is that "instructions" on how to ski become internalized and ultimately function unconsciously. Searle offers an alternative hypothesis by asserting that rules do not become internalized "better", but that repeated experience through practice creates "physical" capacities that make mental "rules" progressively irrelevant.

Bearing these issues in mind a useful theoretical direction would be to develop a concept of the "Geographical Background". Again this rests on the "knowing-how" "knowing-that" distinction. Within the Geographical Background of practical behaviour, "knowing-that" is focused on "knowing-where" and "knowing-when". To some extent, existing concepts within behavioural geography already provide a theoretical basis for the Geographical Background. For example, time-path analysis (Hagerstrand, 1970; Parkes and Thrift, 1980; Pred, 1982; Thrift and Pred, 1981) focuses on how individuals achieve goals within a constraining environment. People are bounded by "capability constraints" (the physical limitations of the world) and "authority constraints" on access. Behaviour is also subject to coupling constraints, that is the person has to join other people or resources for



certain times and at certain places in order to achieve their goal. In general, people are very skilled at negotiating the environment that constitutes the physical world. Although Parkes and Thrift (1980) talk about such negotiation in terms of the formulation of projects, it is argued here that the capacities to negotiate the world are generally at a level of practical consciousness (Giddens, 1979), that is within the Geographical Background. As a preliminary definition the Geographical Background can be seen as the taken-for-granted practical and preintentional geographical skills and understandings that facilitate the negotiation of the physical world.

Although some concepts within behavioural geography are congruent with the Background concept, others require reassessment. One key issue is that of cognitive maps. Cognitive maps are a classic example of the view that in order to act, one must have an internal representation of the world, in this case a representation of spatial layout. Although there is no definitive conceptualisation of the process of cognitive mapping (Golledge and Stimson, 1986), the underlying assumption is that spatial information is held within memory, which must be accessed and utilised in order to negotiate the physical environment. Although mental representations (in some form or other, cf. Kuipers, 1982) undoubtedly do exist, one must question their role

in regulating spatial behaviour. For example, does intimacy with a place imply a highly sophisticated mental representation. Even if one has a representation, is it necessarily utilised? To paraphrase Searle (1983, 150), practice makes perfect not because it results in the perfect memorization of spatial configurations, but because repeated practice may create practical capacities for negotiating physical space that make representations increasingly irrelevant.

The problem with the cognitivist view is that mental representations are taken to exist independently of the behavioural context. Passini (1984) presents an alternative perspective on the regulation of spatial behavior. He argues that way-finding is based on the recognition of visual features, while actively engaged within an environment, rather than detailed recall of spatial information. From this perspective the focus is on the dynamics of purposeful activity within space, rather than the individual's representation of space.

It is not possible to fully develop the concept of the Geographical Background here, but it is useful to point to directions in which the concept can be expanded and applied to problems in geographic research. There is a need to develop a kind of ecology of human behaviour that brings together the poles of agency and structure. Psychology has developed useful approaches

in this respect, such as Barker's "ecological psychology" (1968) and Gibson's notion of affordances (1979). An experiential geography of could be based on the description of the affordance structure of places. Time-geography has provided a starting point for conceptualising the structural aspects of geographical ecology. It is necessary to develop the concept of agency within this framework, to include issues such as perceptual processes, motivation, and individual geographical skills.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### INITIAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### Housing Biography.

(Questions in this section to be repeated for all houses that the participant has lived in)

1. I would like some details about your present/previous house(s).

- i. location
- ii. when occupied
- iii. type (flat, terraced house etc.)
- iv. tenure
- v. utilities/services
- vi. furniture/decor
- vii. basic layout
- viii. rooms
- ix. garden

2. Would you please describe the house to me in your own words.

3. Is there anything you especially remember about the house?

4. Why did you move into this house?

5. What did you particularly like about the house?

6. What did you particularly dislike about the house?

7. Who lived/lives with you in the house?

8. Could you describe the neighbourhood to me?

#### The Subjective Experience of Home.

1. What makes your house into a home? (Prompt- what is the difference between a "house" and a "home"?)

2. Do you feel that your home helps you in any way?

3. Do you have a picture of an ideal home in your mind?

4. What do you like most about your home?

5. Do you ever dislike being in your home?

6. Do you think that your home helps to preserve your memories?

7. Apart from the house itself, are there any other places that you feel is home to you? (eg. street, neighbourhood, city).

#### Home and Getting Older.

1. You are now a pensioner. What has getting older meant to you?
2. What are your hopes and plans for the future?
3. Do you think that a person's home becomes more important to them when they get older?
4. People change over the years. In what ways do you feel that your home does not change?
5. Have your feelings towards your present home changed over the time you have lived here?

#### Staying Put.

1. Have you ever thought about moving from your present house? Why/why not?
2. What would it mean to you if you had to move from this house for some reason?
3. Many older people say that they will never leave their homes, that it will do for them until the end of their days. What do you think about this?
4. From speaking to a lot of retired people, they value their independence a great deal. Why do you think this is?
5. Do you think that an older person's home helps to keep them independent? In what ways?

#### Moving.

Eventually, some older people find that they cannot cope with their present home, or they feel that it no longer suitable. X

1. What sort of living arrangements are available specifically for older people?
2. If you had to move, what sort of arrangements would suit you most?
3. Do you think you would feel at home in the new place?



4. What sort of places would you not like to live? Why not?

### The Geographical Lifeworld.

1. What places did you go to yesterday?
2. Are there any other places that you go to during the week?
3. Are there any places that you go to now and again?
4. Thinking back, are there any places that you used to go to but not any more?
5. Where do you do your shopping?
6. Do you go to the houses of friends or relatives?
7. Are there any places you go to for enjoyment or recreation?
8. Are there any places that you have to go to?
9. Are there any places that you go to get things or find things out?
10. Are there any places that you just go to visit or relax or for holidays?
11. Where did you work?
12. Are there any other places that are important to you?

### Advantages and Disadvantages of Present Home.

1. What are the particular advantages of your home?
2. What are the disadvantages?
3. What are the benefits of living in this neighbourhood?
4. What are the problems of living here?

### Personal and Social Background.

1. When were you born?
2. What were your parents' occupation when you were young?

3. When did you leave school?

4. Could you briefly tell me what you did for a living since then?

5. Could you briefly tell me your family history?

- i. when married
- ii. children born
- iii. bereavement

6. Have you any physical problems or illnesses that might stop you getting around or doing things? (since when).

7. How would you describe yourself?

8. I would like some details on your a. family and b. friends and neighbours.

- i. relationship
- ii. where do they live
- iii. frequency of contact
- iv. where contacted
- v. type of contact

9. When was the last time you saw a member of your family (apart from those living in home)?

10. Do you see other members of your family-

- i. too much
- ii. about right
- iii. too little

11. Apart from your family do you see enough of other people?

- i. too much
- ii. about right
- iii. too little

12. Are there any people who do necessary things for you, such as errands? (family, neighbour, home help, etc.) How do they help you?

13. Over the last few weeks, have you had enough help from other people?

#### 14. PGC Morale Scale.

(answer yes or no, unless told otherwise)

- i. I get more angry than I used to.
- ii. I sometimes worry so much that I cannot sleep.
- iii. Things keep getting worse as I get older.
- iv. Do you feel lonely- not much/a lot
- v. I see enough of my friends and relatives.
- vi. Little things bother me more this year.
- vii. I have as much pep as I had last year.
- viii. I get upset easily.
- ix. I have a lot to be sad about.
- x. Life is hard for me much of the time
- xi. I am as happy now as when I was younger.
- xii. I take things hard.
- xiii. As you get older you are less useful.
- xiv. How satisfied are you with your life today?  
-satisfied/not satisfied.
- xv. I sometimes feel that life isn't worth living.
- xvi. As you get older, do things get better or worse than you thought they would be?- better/worse.



## APPENDIX 2

### CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS.

Location: S Scotswood  
H Heaton

Marital status: M married  
W widowed  
S single

Instrument: A interview  
B multiple sorting task  
C in-depth participant  
D follow-up/evaluation interviews

Partic- ipant	Loca- tion	Sex	Marital status	Age	Instrument
1	H	F	W	77	B
2	H	M	M	83	B
3	H	M	W	80	ABD
4	H	F	W	74	B
5	H	M	M	67	B
6	H	M	M	70	B
7	H	F	S	74	ABD
8	H	M	M	69	B
9	H	F	M	70	B
10	H	M	M	70	B
11	H	F	M	68	ABD
12	H	M	M	69	AB
13	H	M	S	72	ABD
14	H	F	W	82	ABD
15	H	F	W	79	ABD
16	H	F	W	72	ABC
17	H	M	W	71	A
18	H	F	W	78	A
19	H	M	W	80	A
20	H	F	W	73	AC
21	H	F	W	71	A
22	H	F	W	78	A
23	H	M	M	68	A
24	H	M	M	71	A
25	H	M	M	75	A
26	H	F	M	75	A
27	H	M	M	79	A
28	H	F	M	75	A
29	H	M	M	86	ABC
30	H	F	M	80	ABD
31	H	M	W	67	ABD
32	H	M	W	83	ABD
33	H	M	W	91	A

51	S	M	M	70	ABD
52	S	F	W	77	B
53	S	F	W	82	AB
54	S	M	M	71	B
55	S	F	M	75	B
56	S	M	M	75	ABC
57	S	M	M	85	B
58	S	F	W	66	B
59	S	F	S	69	B
60	S	M	M	75	A
61	S	M	M	72	A
62	S	F	M	69	ABD
63	S	M	M	73	A
64	S	F	W	68	ABC
65	S	F	W	76	A
66	S	M	M	67	A
67	S	F	M	68	AB
68	S	M	S	68	A
69	S	M	W	72	A
70	S	M	S	67	A
71	S	M	S	75	A
72	S	M	M	77	ABD
73	S	F	M	72	AB
74	S	M	W	78	A
75	S	F	W	67	A
76	S	M	M	81	A
77	S	M	M	80	A
78	S	M	M	67	A
79	S	M	W	77	ABC
80	S	F	W	80	A

## APPENDIX 3

### MEANINGS OF HOME.

a. It's What You Make It. A person's home does not come ready-made. It is something that is built up by living in a place. This category emphasises the active role of the person in establishing the relationship with the home environment (numbers in parantheses refer to participant):

"It's the home that you build around you. Everything is important in it" (3).

"Really, no matter the house, what the home is is what you do to it yourself. It could be unhappy if you don't like the place. But in our time you didn't look for faults. You made the most of things. You put all the little things that you can have to make it like you want it. We've done a few alterations and decorating. It just makes your place into a home" (11).

"It's just as you make it. It's the people concerned isn't it? You either make it your home or just a house. It depends on yourself. It's lived-in. You have your friends in, and the family that you like. That's what



makes it home and not a building" (28).

In a metaphorical sense, to dwell is to build. This is apparent in the way people talked about the establishment of their homes. Heidegger's (1962) notion of "dwelling" is significant here, where "building", "dwelling" and "being" are synonomous: human "being" is "being-in-the-world" and is therefore "dwelling", and to dwell implies building, where the home is the prime focus of dwelling. However, one does not need to literally build a house in order to be at home in it. Home comes about through a process of appropriation; a transaction between the affordances of the house and the needs and desires of the dweller. In this process, it is not so much the physical qualities of the house that are significant, but the meanings and relationships that one establishes with them (Graumann, 1978). Indeed, many of the facets of home experience discussed below are underpinned by the action of the individual within the context of the house: making a place comfortable, or establishing family life. Even though "it's what you make it" was not always articulated as a part of home experience, one can suggest that it is a fundamental dimension.

b. Familiarity. Familiarity is a rather nebulous and all-embracing concept and participants used the word for

feelings that are often vague and difficult to express. The idea of familiarity can involve a number of relationships between person and place:

"Well, you get used to it. Your friends come to see you. If you've been in an area any length of time, you get accustomed to a place. There is a neighbourly atmosphere. If you move away you wouldn't know anyone" (72).

For this man, being familiar with a place has three related dimensions. Firstly, familiarity is built up over time. Secondly, this interaction establishes knowledge of the place and people. Finally, familiarity affords a feeling of protection, and to move to an unfamiliar place would make one feel vulnerable. There is a temporal emphasis here, and if one is to understand the experience of familiarity, it is important to map the transactions between person and place that define that experience (Werner et al, 1985; Altman and Rogoff, 1986).

c. Good Neighbours. Having good neighbours involved several issues:

"It's making friends that's important. Like attracts like. I don't know exactly what it is. I have had very

good neighbours. I'm not one for running in and out of neighbours' houses, but it is nice to know there are people nearby. I have two good friends here. they call round to see me. I have very good friends. I don't see the neighbours very much, but I know that they are there if I need them" (20).

"It's living in the place. It's a pleasant and happy place. Affection and all that kind of stuff. It's pleasant and happy here; having good neighbours as well. We have some nice neighbours and friends around here. They've got nothing, but they'll share it with you" (54).

Having neighbours and being neighbourly is a social thing; neighbours can also be friends. But neighbourliness can go beyond friendship. It can be a matter of interdependence between individuals in a locality. Another aspect may be the general atmosphere engendered by the friendly relations in a locality (see "community", cat v).

d. Like to return. Home is a locus from which you must go and inevitably return. It provides a material and centre for a person's world (Gelwicks, 1970). This spatial differentiation also has instrumental and symbolic dimensions, in terms of the activities



associated with the home and the personal significance of the home domain. For example:

"As long as I have a book and a decent bed, I am quite happy. If you have a house, you can shut the door. You can do what you want. It's nice to come back and shut yourself in and please yourself what you do. Lots of people I meet say it's terrible being on your own, but I don't mind being on my own. I mightn't have much, but at least I can feel comfortable. I can't explain why" (18).

For this lady, home is a place associated with a pleasant, quiet life, and her home is a nice place to come back to. The significance of "returning to" also involves "returning from" somewhere. The preference for return always involves this antithesis. many of the participants talked about returning home almost with a sense of relief or gratitude. In this way home can be seen as a haven, or a fixed point in a demanding world:

"It's somewhere to retire into for a bit of peace and quiet, being able to sit in. It suits us, being able to be quiet. It's somewhere to come back to and know that you've got it" (28).

e. Memories. For many of the participants, memories, both good and bad, were important components of their

home experience. For example:

"Memories are important. We had good times here. I could write a book. They are happy memories; the children. I had two grandchildren born here. If I went to another house it would have no memories. I couldn't leave it" (20).

This lady is very attached to her home, an attachment that is founded upon its associations with the past. As already noted, home is something that is built up over time. Although the present and future are significant components, many personally significant meanings point back to past events. In particular, valued memories focus upon family life, and these are often especially significant to widowed people.

f. Security. The concept of "security" has a number of related sub-meanings. Firstly, the home affords security in terms of protection:

"If you have your house and you're locked-up in your own place, you are alright. It means everything, doesn't it? You cannot feel secure in lodgings. It's a certain amount of security. Once you get in your house and your door is shut, you are landed aren't you? I wouldn't open my door at night time like" (53).

There are clear parallels with the concept of privacy (see category i). Both are a matter of regulating boundaries and access to the personal domain. The house confers control and thereby affords security and privacy. For example:

"It makes you feel secure. In your own home, you can shut everybody on the outside, apart from your immediate family like" (51).

A third aspect of security is associated with the idea of "permanence" (cat. q):

"It helps you to know that you have something secure to come back to" (61).

Permanence would seem to be a logical and necessary component of security. Without the conviction or knowledge that the personal domain is safe and will remain safe, then that place cannot be truly a "home".

q. Comfort. For a place to be a home. then it must fulfil the dwellers basic needs in terms of physical comfort:

"You need to be warm. In the last place we just had a



coal fire in the back room. One room was OK, but the rest was freezing. Mind the coke is very expensive. I spend £24 a fortnight for coke, plus gas and electricity. I can hardly manage it on the pension. A gas fire and central heating would be a lot cheaper. Once you get the fire going, it is OK here, but it is so expensive. I couldn't do without the fire. I need it as I have arthritis" (9).

For this person, the house must meet certain physical requirements that are based on personal needs. Comfort is not something that exists independently of the dweller. It is a transactional quality of home, emerging from a person's experience and future goals and needs. The concept goes beyond physical amenity. For example:

"Comfort. I think, nothing else. As long as it's warm in the winter. You feel that you belong here after 50 years" (55).

This statement is a progression of associations and meanings: comfort; warm in winter; belonging. Comfort is a matter of being sustained and protected both physically and spiritually.

h. Family. The large number of people who mentioned "family" indicates that this category is the major

component of home experience:

"The love and care that you have there. Your family and you care for them. You bring them up and see them settled. It's having your family around us and caring for them, and them helping you, when you have troubles. It's your family that makes your home. I just live for them, to see them alright and me alright" (52).

One could assume that people who have no family living with them experience home in a different way to those who have family with them. Certainly, for many people, a house without a family can be an empty and lonely place. Nevertheless, people living on their own still experience "home" in some way, with memories of past family life playing a crucial role.

i. Privacy. The control over personal space afforded by the house is central to issues such as security and privacy. For many participants, privacy is the prime focus of their home experience:

"I like to come in and shut the door, and people can't come in if I don't want them to and I can invite them in if I want to. It's a sort of freedom, isn't it? I never hear the neighbours. It's very quiet. I just like to be quiet. I can be quiet here" (7).

The role of the home in affording privacy is clear in this case. the fact that this person can legitimately exclude others by shutting the door is the main instrumental function of the house. Phenomenologically, this privacy is the means by which the dweller attains goals such as solitude, intimacy, and "being quiet".

j. Do What You Want. Again this category seems closely related to other aspects of home experience, such as "privacy" (cat. i) and "the place for the things I like to do" (cat. p). These are evident in the following quote:

"Home is being happy and just loving it. A house is just bricks and mortar. A home is something that is lived-in; somewhere you can laugh when you like and cry when you like, whenever you have them to do. where you can entertain your friends" (4).

Home is a place where one can be oneself and do those things that require an intimate space. The significance of the home is that it is the domain of the self (cat. y), the place that is, more than any other place, controlled by the individual.



k. Arrange The Place How You Like. Several people mentioned that being able to arrange or manipulate the physical fabric of the house was important to them:

"Well you furnish it how you like, arrange it how you like. It's between the two of you, you and your wife. It's a partnership. The pair of you make it. We've spent a lot of money and effort on this house" (23).

This category points to the "home as symbol of self" that has been a major theme in home research. Through personalization of the basic physical environment, the dweller can give their own meaning to the place in which they live, reflecting the identity of the individual (Steinfeld, 1981; Becker, 1973; Cooper, 1972, 1974). The home may be an important component in a person's sense of identity, but there are other related issues. For example, being able to arrange one's own home may be simply a matter of making it more comfortable. The above quotation also points to links with "It's what you make it" (cat. a) and "family" (cat. h).

l. Lived-in. This category refers to the obvious point that a home is not simply a building, but a place where someone lives:

"It's important not to be too strict in a house. Some

people won't allow you to sit on a chair or a cushion. Some people are always fiddling about tidying things. A home is lived-in. A house can just be a show place. We had a friend who had a beautiful house, but sat on stools and not on the chairs" (1).

Again, this category can be seen to be related to others: "do what you want (cat. j), or "arrange place how I like" (cat. k). The emphasis of "lived-in" is on relaxation in the comfort and intimacy of the home. It is a place where you can be yourself, without reference to others.

m. Friendly People Around. "Home" is not necessarily equivalent to the house itself. A person's conception of home may extend to the locality, region or country. At the level of the locality, a number of participants emphasised the friendliness of the people living around:

"Everybody is your neighbour around here. They are a lot of rogues and vagabonds like, but you speak to them and that and think 'there but for the grace of God go I'. We know everybody around here and they know us".

Obviously, this category is related to "good neighbours" (cat. c). Perhaps the difference between the two is that "having friendly people around" does not imply the

mutual assistance that is involved in participants' understanding of neighbourliness.

n. Happiness. Although one cannot assume that the home environment is always a happy one, this does seem an important part of many people's conception of home. There seems to be two aspects to this. Firstly, happiness can be part of the "atmosphere" (cat. u) of a place:

"It's the atmosphere really. the company. The wife and I get on together. I think you can tell a happy home, when you go in it. That is when it becomes a home and not a house" (5).

This also involves a second dimension; that happiness is associated with family life in the home:

"I suppose the family makes the home doesn't it? If people get on together, it's bound to be a happy home. Of course it's a happy place. You just accept things as they come, nothing really more" (24).

These family aspects seem to underlie the experience of happiness. One should consider the significance of "unhappiness" within the home. For example, where the family relationships are breaking down, or where death



has left people alone. However, many widowed people talked about their homes as happy places in the present tense. For them, the happiness of family life lives on through their memories (cat. e).

o. Convenient Locality. When asked what home meant to them, a few people mentioned that the area in which they lived was convenient in terms of facilities and services:

"Over the years it has improved, since we came in. The council have spent a lot of money. We have the facilities around and the buses and that and the shops around" (76).

This category can be seen as an extension of the idea of "comfort" (cat. g) into the locality around the house. One can suggest that an area must offer certain minimum levels of services that are appropriate to the perceived needs of the people living there. Although participants have usually defined "home" by personal and symbolic meanings, the more instrumental issue of local services should not be ignored.

p. The Place For The Things I Like To Do. Several people felt that their homes were important because of the

activities they carried on there. One man was a railway enthusiast, who used his house as a centre for his work and collection of railway memorabilia:

"Your home is the place you build around us. Everything is important. I have a terrific collection of stuff now. I would hate to lose anything out of it. I need the space. I use it. It is useful for my work. It is the only place that I can use like this. Moving would mean a hell of a lot. For a start, where would I find a place to fit all my belongings" (3).

People were often fond of gardening or do-it-yourself, while one man was on an Open University course saw his home as a place for studying. With the loss of employment on retirement, many of the participants replaced work related activities with hobbies and informal work.

g. Ownership and Possession. Owning one's own house was important for some people. In the first instance ownership confers basic rights over the property:

"It's security as far as I am concerned. To think that you have a roof over your head and that no-one can come along and say 'it's mine, get out'" (24).

Ownership means affords permanence, security and control, but may also be the basis of more personally significant meanings:

"My husband and I bought it together and lived in it together, and the family coming and going. It's what you make it yourself. You try to make it as comfortable as possible" (22).

For this lady, buying a house was the start of her married life, an association which is important to her in widowhood. The commitment to buying the house was part of the "building" (cat. a) that is fundamental to dwelling. In present day culture, ownership is usually seen in a very positive light because of the security and stability it affords. Nevertheless, most of the participants who lived in property rented either from the council or private landlords expressed the same feelings of permanence and commitment. Although the fact of ownership is important to owner-occupiers, this does not seem to be an essential quality of home experience, and it may be more fruitful to talk in terms of "possession" rather than ownership per se.

r. Proximity to Family. Some people mentioned that living near to where members of their family lived was important to them. For example:



"It's with being here that long that I wouldn't like to change. It's too late in life now. My mother lives across the road. She's 93. I've been asked by the council if the house is not too big for one person? I've been here so long, I wouldn't move. I like the garden. I have a key for my mother's house and for the people next door" (69).

In this case, being close to family was a general everyday concern, as well as a matter of filial attachment. It should also be remembered that one's family can be an important in social and instrumental terms:

"Well, I lived here the best part of my married life. I saw little of my husband in the war years. When we moved here, it was more or less the beginning of my married life. I knew all my husband's relatives and they all lived around here. His brother lived upstairs and another lived in Robert Street. On the whole I would I would say it was convenient. There are people around me that I know" (75).

s. Physical Aspects of the Home. This is a rather "catch-all" category that encompasses the physical attributes of the home that have not been included under

"comfort" (cat. g) and "convenient locality" (cat. o). The emphasis is not so much on the physical fabric of the house per se, but on the use to which it is put. For example, many participants said that having a garden was important to them:

"No matter what kind of home you live in, you have to work at it. If you don't look after it, you can't get the pleasure out of it. But the garden is getting a bit big now. That's a bit worrying now, especially when you used to keep it lovely before. I won second prize for the best garden in Newcastle. I don't like the work, but I like the end product. I laid all the paths in the garden"

The physical fabric of the house provides the material basis for the more symbolic qualities of home experience. The house is something that you work with, symbolically building the home around you.

t. Belonging. A few people said that they "belong" in the place they lived. This is a rather vague notion, and perhaps implies some of the other categories of home meaning. For example, "belonging" and "familiarity" (cat. b) have parallels:

"After you have lived in a place for 50 years you feel

that you belong here" (55).

The notion of "belonging" has been given a good deal of attention by humanistic geographers (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1980). However, the term was not widely used by participants, suggesting that this was not a conscious concern. Rather, it may be an unreflective relationship between person and place. Perhaps it is simply a feeling of "correctness", as illustrated by one participant's struggle to express her feeling of being at home:

"I have lived here so long. I was alright as far as knowing people. By brother's family all live around here. It's the only house more or less that I have had. I wouldn't like to move even though the area is deteriorating. It's convenient for the buses" (75).

For this lady, home is explained in terms of a number of issues: familiarity, family and social ties, convenience. All these facets add up to the "correct" place. No other place could provide this sense of belonging and correctness.

u. Pleasant Atmosphere. As with "belonging" (cat. t), this is a nebulous concept, used to articulate something that cannot really be expressed. Participants felt that their homes possessed some intrinsic quality such as



"happiness" (cat. n). This atmosphere is not so much something in the dweller, but more an external quality of the place itself:

"It's the atmosphere. I feel comfortable and happy inside the house. I am in the house an awful lot you see, with my mother the way she is. If I have been out, I am glad to get back home again. It's that kind of atmosphere" (67).

Some people realised that the source of the pleasant atmosphere lies within the person themselves:

"It's you yourself that makes a home. You can relax and just forget about the rest of the world. Put your feet up, nice and warm. If you are contented, if you are living in a contented atmosphere" (31).

The significant point is that the home is seen as conferring a particular quality of "contentedness". This quality is a function of how the dweller interacts with the home as a physical place. In the last quote, the person has moved from defining home in terms of the self, to defining it in terms of the "atmosphere" of the place. Eventually, it is as if we ourselves do not contribute to the emotional qualities of the home. Home experience is thus very much an externalised and relict experience that is built up over time.

v. Community Feeling. Although this was one of the least significant meanings to emerge from the content analysis, it was felt necessary to differentiate it from the related concepts of "good neighbours" (cat. c) and "friendliness of people" (cat. m). The difference lies in the way people use the word "community". Most people were content to use expressions such as neighbourliness. Those people who used "community" were more self-consciously concerned with fostering an ideal of how people should behave in a locality:

"It's being in a community; a community where people are working together for the good of all".

w. Bring Friends Back. For some people, their homes were central to all aspects of their life, including their social life:

"A house is just bricks and mortar. A home is something that is lived-in. Somewhere you can entertain your friends".

Although this category did not figure widely in people's accounts, this issue deserves comment. Rosenberg (1979) suggests that friends are an important component in the

stability of the self-concept. A person's house may be symbolic in this respect. Who is invited in reflects and communicates the dweller's wishes in terms of social interaction.

x. Personal Objects. The significance of personal objects can be seen in relation to other categories: "arrange place how I like" (cat. k); "it's what you make it" (cat. a); self (cat. y). The basic theme is again that of personalization and appropriation of the physical place. To illustrate:

"The person not here has kept me going; the wife like. What she's done, I do now. I keep the things going. She's still here. I have all the photos. I have them all over the house, in the living-room and in the bedroom" (56)

For some people using this category, it is the objects themselves that are associated with home, rather than the house in itself. In this way the home can be seen to be transportable, rather than being grounded in a particular place. These objects represent important links to the past and reinforce identity and continuity.

y. Self. The phenomenological concept of "dwelling" (see



cat. a), suggests that home and self reflect each other. Bachelard (1969) argues that just as house and non-house are domains of physical space, self and non-self present a parallel division of psychic space. Similarly, Norberg-Schultz (1972) argues that geographical and psychical space are congruent with the home as the locus of the self. Thus, home involves a transaction between person and place, where home and self constitute each other. For example:

"It's me, what I do to it, that makes it home. I have a picture of a suffragette addressing a crowd on the Quayside. I would miss it terribly, if I ever lost it. All my things mean something, every jug, every picture. All have a story which means something to me. I have some antiques that have come down through the family. Things that nobody else have. They make a home. A home without books is terrible. I have given a lot away, but they are still so important" (14).

For this lady, it was her possessions that defined "home", but they were equally expressive of her identity. The centrality of self to the concept of home is in terms of control (cat. j) and symbolism/expression (cats. a and k). In terms of control, a person's home is a place where you can be yourself. In symbolic terms the house reflects the dweller, not only in an expressive sense, but also in terms of reinforcing the occupant's

self-conception.

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